

Meeting

Conflicting

Demands

The results of a study on managing diverse parking goals and expectations on college campuses.

By Dave McKinney, EdH, CAPP

Customers have highly diverse expectations of those who provide parking services. Administrators of parking operations face the formidable challenge of meeting multiple customer expectations while also achieving financial business objectives. In the course of setting and achieving goals related to meeting many diverse demands, parking administrators must also set and achieve goals surrounding the critical business necessities of generating and controlling revenue and maximizing profits. At times, these goals may not always appear to be compatible.

Are they in conflict? That was the central question I recently asked in a survey sent to several hundred administrators of college and university campus parking operations across the U.S., in cooperation with the International Parking Institute (IPD). According to the results, there is at least some degree of goal conflict among campus parking administrators in public higher education.

Balance

One of the greatest challenges faced by campus parking administrators in the U.S. appears to be balancing goals related to the business side of their operations (revenue, profitability) with goals related to the service side of their operations (academic support, student recruitment/retention). I have personally experienced this dilemma during my

13 years as a senior administrator of campus parking. Many of my colleagues in campus parking express similar struggles with the perceived conflict between goals related to revenue and those related to service.

In partial fulfillment of my recently completed doctoral degree, I conducted a study of U.S. campus parking administrators that focused on this problem of goal conflict. Respondents completed a 42-item questionnaire and provided additional demographic information related to them and the institutions they serve.

The responses resulted in a goal conflict score for each respondent that indicated the level of goal conflict they perceived experiencing at their jobs as college campus parking administrators. A higher score indicated more severe goal conflict, while

a lower score indicated moderate to mild goal conflict. Various statistical tests were run to note the significance of the individual and institutional demographics in relation to the goal conflict score. The results provided some interesting insight into how well campus parking administrators manage conflicting goals and diverse customer expectations and the common factors that seem to be the most significant among the best parking administrators.

Several U.S. research surveys indicate that, in many states, the percentage of public college and university budgets funded by state government appropriations has decreased for 20 years or more. In response to this decrease in state funding, institutions of higher education are turning to alternative financing sources to contribute to the bottom line, fund continued growth initiatives, and remain competitive. The traditional perception of campus parking operations as perennial cash cows makes them even more attractive as sources of revenue for cash-strapped institutions. My dissertation research indicated that campus parking administrators are experiencing intensifying expectations from their institutional executive leaders to maximize revenue and profitability within their parking operations.

Mission

On the other hand, campus parking administrators are also experiencing pressure to contribute the academic and service missions of the institutions at which they serve. Public higher education has become increasingly aggressive and competitive when it comes to recruiting new students. Institutional executive leaders and constituents expect their campus faculty and staff to pull out all the stops, so to speak, in reaching the goals of institutional enrollment management strategies.

The dilemma for campus parking administrators is that many of the revenue-generating activities of their operations are potentially perceived as a hindrance or even hostile to institutional academic and service missions and efforts to recruit and retain students. Parking ticket fines and other parking fees are often not viewed in a positive context by the constituents served by campus parking operations in higher education. Parking administrators in public higher education can potentially find themselves between the proverbial rock and hard place when attempting to fulfill expectations related to both revenue and academics and service.

Although my research indicates that campus parking administrators experience goal conflict when seeking to balance these diverse goals, the study also appears to reveal that they generally resolve the conflict successfully. Overall, campus parking administrators are able to set and achieve goals related to revenue and the institutional bottom line while also setting and achieving goals related to academics and service and the recruitment/retention of students. I believe this is great news for campus parking professionals and for the parking industry as a whole.

Although more research would be needed to be conclusive, I suspect that these results could be extended to parking administrators beyond the higher education context. During my years in parking administration, I have observed the impressive ability of parking professionals in all sectors to successfully manage the diverse and sometimes conflicting expectations of their customers and constituents. Parking professionals seem to find ways to passionately and creatively deliver the highest achievable levels of customer service and satisfaction while also meeting their financial and business objectives.

My research revealed several significant factors that seem common among campus parking administrators who are the most successful at managing goal conflict and diverse customer expectations. Three are at the forefront: goal clarity, education/training/experience, and gender.

The most successful administrators appear to be those

who are best able to not only set goals but to communicate and consistently clarify the rationale of those goals to their frontline staff. Previous studies conducted by other researchers found that frontline staff in higher education actually experience more intense goal conflict than their

TABLE 1

Survey Responses by Job Responsibilities

Responsibility	%
Senior Manager/Administrator/Director	59.6
Assistant Manager/Administrator/Director	19.9
Supervisor	20.5

TABLE 2

Survey Responses by Years of Experience in Current Positions

Years of Experience	%
0 to 3	30.4
4 to 10	38.5
10 to 20	21.7
More than 20	9.3

TABLE 3

Survey Responses by Highest Level of Education

Highest Level of Education	%
High School/GED	11.8
Associate's Degree	8.1
Bachelor's Degree	46.6
Graduate Degree	33.5

TABLE 4

Department/Division to which Administrators Report

Department/Division	%
Finance/Business/Administration	70.2
Facilities Management/Physical Plant	11.8
Academic Affairs/Provost	1.2
Student Affairs	8.7
Campus Police	8.1

TABLE 5**Student Enrollment at the Campuses where Administrators Work**

Student Enrollment	%
Less than 5,000	1.2
5,000 to 10,000	6.8
10,000 to 20,000	26.7
20,000 to 30,000	26.7
More than 30,000	38.5

TABLE 6**Geographic Settings at the Campuses where Administrators Work**

Geographic Settings	%
Urban	55.3
Suburban	31.7
Rural	13.0

supervisors and senior administrators. This conflict is even more acute when there is uncertainty regarding which goals among multiple are most important and regarding the rationale for the goals that are set. When frontline staff receive clear communication from their supervisors about goal priorities and the ultimate purpose of the set goals, conflict becomes much more manageable. Frontline employees deliver better job performance and experience higher levels of job satisfaction when goal priorities and rationale are clearly communicated. Job performance and satisfaction are even higher when supervisors include frontline employees in the goal setting process itself, not just the goal communication and achievement process.

Another significant factor revealed in the study was the level of education and training of the survey respondents. Those surveyed were asked to indicate their highest level of education achieved, such as high school, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or graduate degree. More than 80 percent of those surveyed indicated they held higher education degrees. The research results indicated a strong relationship between the level of education among campus parking administrators and

the ability to manage conflicting goals and competing customer expectations.

Closely related to this factor were years of experience on the current job and level of professional training. Nearly 30 percent of those surveyed indicated they had more than 10 years of parking administration experience at their current institutions.

Overall, the combination of higher levels of education and more years of experience and training were significant. Campus parking administrators with higher levels of education, experience, and training indicated a corresponding moderation in the intensity of conflict they perceived in their work as parking administrators. More research would be needed to identify specifically how these factors result in improved management of goal conflict and customer expectations, but the study indicates that the levels of education, experience, and training are significant in campus parking administration.

A third significant factor extracted from the survey of gender. The research results indicated a significant relationship between gender and goal conflict in campus parking administration. Overall, female respondents had a better goal conflict score on the survey than



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TABLE 9

"I am strongly committed to pursuing goals in my campus parking operation related to maximizing revenue."

Goal Commitment Measure (Revenue) Scores, M = 4.73

Score	%
1—Strongly Disagree	1.9
2	6.8
3	6.2
4	23.6
5	24.2
6—Strongly Agree	37.3

TABLE 10

"I am strongly committed to pursuing goals in my campus parking operation related to the institution's academic and service mission."

Goal Commitment Measure (Academic/Service) Scores, M = 5.26

Score	%
1—Strongly Disagree	0.6
2	0.6
3	4.3
4	12.4
5	30.4
6—Strongly Agree	51.6

TABLE 7

Gender of Respondent

Gender	%
Female	39.1
Male	60.9

TABLE 8

Age of Respondent

Age	%
23-30	6.1
31-40	17.1
41-55	54.0
56-65	20.3
Over 65	2.5

males. Therefore, female parking administrators in public higher education appear to be better managers of conflicting goals and diverse customer expectations than their male colleagues.

More research is needed to consider the specific reasons for the significance of gender, but the factor of gender appears to be significant regardless of the presence or absence of the specific reasons. The survey indicated that 60 percent of campus parking administrators are males, and 40 percent are females. Based on the significance of the gender factor, the leveling of any gender imbalance in campus parking administration in public higher education will potentially result in even better management of goal conflict and diverse customer expectations.

Significance

The issue of managing goal conflict and diverse customer expectations in any organization, profession, or industry is no small matter.

Much of my research was grounded in the validity and reliability of goal setting theory established by researchers and authors Edwin Locke, Gary Latham, and Cynthia Lee. Their research over several decades concludes that a failure to manage goal conflict potentially results in many negative workplace issues, including low job motivation, performance, and satisfaction. These negative issues tend to become entrenched in the workplace culture and perpetuate over time. I believe this issue is worthy of the attention of not only campus parking administrators in higher education, but all parking professionals.

I encourage my colleagues in college campus parking administration to consider the significance of these factors. First, it appears critical that we invest significant time to include our frontline staff in the goal-setting process and to not only communicate goals and expectations but connect them to the bigger picture of the operational mission with a rationale for their achievement. It is important to declare not only what is expected but why it is expected. Second, parking administrators should invest significant time in education and training, not only for themselves but for their teams. There appears to be a direct and significant relationship between education and training and the ability of both administrators and frontline staff to manage conflicting goals and diverse customer expectations. Finally, campus parking administrators should work aggressively toward diversity and equity within the operations they manage and seek to level any gender imbalance. This study in particular indicated the significant role that female administrators have in the ability to manage goal conflict and multiple customer expectations.

TABLE 11

“Please select the rating that best indicates your overall level of goal commitment between goals related to revenue and goals related to academics/service.”

Goal Commitment Measure (Overall) Scores, M = 3.86

Score	%
1—Revenue	0.6
2	9.9
3	25.5
4	37.9
5	19.3
6—Academics/Service	6.8

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