To the organized, go the students

The University operates with an Enrollment Management system that utilizes techniques ranging from ’marketing’ to retention studies to insure high quality and numbers of students.

by John Maguire

The next decade, most experts tell us, will be one of retrenchment for private higher education. Already there are application and enrollment drops that presage belt-tightening for the prestigious, and huge deficits, sagging faculty and student morale, and possible closings or mergers for many less fortunate colleges and universities.

The ominous signs are all around us. For one thing, the national birth rate has continued to plunge at a precipitate rate, so that there will be about 30 percent fewer 17-year-olds eligible for college in the late 1980s than there have been in recent years. Even more alarming is the perception among a growing number of young people today that, with escalating college costs and diminishing payoffs in terms of guaranteed career opportunities, a post-secondary education simply may not be worth the huge investment.

Boston College, as a private university with almost total dependence on tuition income, is in a particularly vulnerable position. An unanticipated shortfall of little more than two percent of the undergraduate student body would result in an immediate $1 million operating deficit. Six years ago, without warning, an even more serious deficit actually did occur and the reverberations from those bleak days of sharp tuition increases and a subsequent student strike are only now subsiding.

Today, all around the country, at other outstanding institutions such as the Universities of Detroit and San Francisco, as well as a myriad of smaller, weaker colleges, problems of enrollment drops, faculty cutbacks and budget crises are compounding. Within the past few months, one of the most important universities in the country, faced with an unanticipated large deficit, had to scurry for 100 additional freshmen after all notices of acceptance and rejection had long since been mailed to anxious applicants. And not all schools are so fortunate as to be able to offset such losses at the 11th hour.

But what does all this mean for this university in 1976 and beyond, into the next decade? Are we simply at the mercy of runaway economic and cultural forces that doom any optimistic vision of our future? Or can we plan in such a way as to force our fortunes to be decidedly different from others with less foresight?

Boston College takes the position that through conscientious planning and measured decision-making, we can exert significant influence over our destiny. To facilitate this, the University has undertaken during the last three years the most comprehensive long-range academic and fiscal planning in its 113-year history.

One of the major fruits of the effort has been the emergence of the concept of Enrollment Management. Simply stated, Enrollment Management is a process that brings together often disparate functions having to do with recruiting, funding, tracking, retaining and replacing students as they move toward, within and away from the University. Although these various strategies are, to one degree or another, widespread in most colleges and universities, Boston College has recently been on the leading edge of the growing movement to reduce fragmentation by systematizing and integrating these fields into one grand design.

There are five major goals of the University’s evolving Enrollment Management program:

Marketing admissions

Boston College must continue to develop an admissions marketing program to attract outstanding students in sufficient numbers during a period of possible national enrollment declines.

Until four or five years ago the mere mention of the word “marketing,” in the context of recruiting students, would probably have induced instantaneous dyspepsia in a faculty member or academic administrator. New, due to a more sophisticated understanding of the marketing concept (and also because at many institutions livelihoods are threatened), colleges and universities are becoming more comfortable with this term.

The word, it must be emphasized, is not to be confused with hucksterism and slick sales techniques. Marketing is a systematic effort to merge institutional strengths with consumer (student) interests. The starting point for Boston College was the development of a long-range academic plan, which brought into sharper focus our institutional goals and objectives, as well as the specific programs that could best meet those goals. The next step becomes the identification of potential students whose interests and abilities best coincide with these offerings.

Although the admissions office is the most visible marketing agent in the University, a successful marketing effort has its foundation in outstanding programs and faculty. The task of a good admissions operation is to communicate these strengths to the student marketplace in a forthright and persuasive fashion.

In the past five years at Boston College, we have witnessed a startling increase in freshman/transfer applications, from 7,000 to 14,000. The reasons for this good fortune are many and certainly should not be attributed exclusively to better marketing. Boston College benefitted and
learned from the misfortunes and mistakes of other institutions, even as we performed the difficult task of putting our own house in order through long-range fiscal and academic planning. Certainly, the equalization of the female-male population has greatly strengthened our attractiveness. And bold moves such as the acquisition of the Newton Campus and the construction of the magnificent Recreation Complex have contributed as well.

But new techniques in marketing have also played a major role. Perhaps the most significant advancement in this decade has been the addition of more than 1,000 alumni, faculty and student volunteers to the admissions program. Now, in all parts of the country (and even in Europe), B.C. alumni representatives are recruiting and counseling prospective students. Faculty members are giving unstintingly of their time by remaining on call for unscheduled office interviews and by visiting high schools. Students in unprecedented numbers have organized the Boston College Student Volunteer Program to facilitate peer interaction at all levels, from the standard tour to the admissions interview. Through these efforts, the capacity of the admissions staff to personalize service for prospective students and their families has been multiplied by at least a factor of 10.

Annual marketing questionnaires are now sent to all accepted applicants, both those who attend and those who choose to go elsewhere, in an effort to determine why they opted to go elsewhere. Through analysis of these surveys, trends can be spotted that sometimes result in adjustments to admissions strategy or even to University academic programs and student services.

Next to academic reputation, for example, our studies indicate that the two strongest reasons why students come to study here are the Boston location and the attractiveness of our campuses. One of the most pervasive "people" influences on prospective students turned out to be parents — far more important than guidance counselors or admissions officers. As a direct result of these discoveries, the city of Boston is now displayed much more prominently in all of our literature, campus photos are featured, the number of tours and on-campus interviews has been greatly increased and parents are encouraged to get involved more directly with the admissions process. These are but a few changes that have resulted from intensive market research.

The "Philadelphia experiment" is another example of the University's innovative marketing. To understand which admissions approaches were most cost-effective and also to determine the feasibility of opening up new recruitment areas, the greater Philadelphia region was singled out for a massive, diversified marketing experiment. Traditional recruitment methods such as high school visits, large receptions and direct mail and magazine advertising campaigns, were undertaken in a controlled fashion. Results to date indicate that the opportunity for market expansion does exist, but at a relatively high cost. Also, there is a carry-over from one year to the next, so that the investment does have a residual effect. Finally, this project has taught us that traditional methods, backed by the help of committed alumni, faculty, and student volunteers, will usually work better than the expensive "gimmicky" techniques.

By adopting a marketing orientation, Boston College now has a much more sharply honed understanding of students' perceptions of our position among our competitors. We can now pinpoint, and better influence, the sequence of decisions that determine the final investment (of four years) and $20,000 in college education.

Research and information flow

Boston College must improve coordination of institutional research and information flow among University offices and with external agencies.

A fundamental aspect of Enrollment Management at Boston College is the accurate, timely tracking of student flow. At a school such as Harvard, this is a relatively simple matter: 1200 freshmen enter and four years later, with relatively few detours, about 1200 seniors graduate. Likewise at many of the smaller colleges now on open admissions, accounting for students presents few problems; everyone is admitted and most of what happens thereafter, with only one or two important exceptions, is essentially un-
Controllable. But at this university, and others in our intermediate category, coordination of student migration can boggle the mind and at times confound the computer.

There are about 20 different ways to move in or out of a school or class at Boston College; entrance as a freshman in September and graduation four years later in May as a senior are but the two simplest possibilities. With the coming of the national “transfer phenomenon,” students, often with goals decided well in advance, are freely switching programs and schools. This now happens so often at the national level that more than 50 percent of those graduating from four-year schools began elsewhere as freshmen.

Internal transfers are also multiplying, as are “drop-outs,” “stop-outs,” and students spending junior year abroad or on exchange programs. Admission and graduation at mid-year are now relatively commonplace, due both to changed high school graduation standards and increased chances for acceleration in college.

To understand and control this complex flow, reliable computerized information systems are essential. Standardized definitions, agreed to by all relevant departments, are necessary components of a useful data base. Most important of all, the coordination of data retrieval, with analysis and timely decision-making based on that data, must be maintained across departments.

It was primarily with this in mind that the University last year centralized the control of undergraduate admissions, financial aid for incoming students, records and registration. This has facilitated the continuous tracking of those students leaving the University as well as the immediate feedback of this information to freshman and transfer admissions, so that more accurate decisions on enrollment quotas (male/female, resident/commuter, the four undergraduate colleges, etc.) can be made.

Market prediction and institutional response

Boston College must develop a capability to anticipate immediate and long-term student interests and methods for improving its ability to provide for these interests.

This is probably the most difficult and most misunderstood of all the objectives of the Enrollment Management program. On the one hand, very little definitive work has been done at the national and state levels in the area of manpower planning and projected student demand; and on the other hand, it is not clear to what extent a university like Boston College, strongly committed to the enduring values of a liberal arts education, can and should adapt its curriculum to the vagaries of the marketplace.

Students today are more interested in career-oriented education than their predecessors were, as jobs in many fields have become more scarce. The preprofessional schools are still being deluged with applications, even though areas such as nursing and law are rapidly reaching saturation. The business school boom continues, especially among women motivated by changing attitudes and by increased opportunities through affirmative action programs.

How can Boston College cope with these trends while being true to ideals and meeting obligations to students seeking direction in a depressed job market? First of all, we should do everything possible to counsel applicants at the entry point and beyond about the realistic odds for achieving educational objectives in fields such as medicine and law. Secondly, we should explore alternatives that will allow them to keep options flexible for as long as possible, in case mid-course changes are called for. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must be articulate and steadfast in defending those traditions rooted in a liberal arts, value-oriented education that contribute to “making a life and not merely a living.”

We can do all this while conducting demand studies through such external agencies as the College Board and through internal processes such as registration and periodic student surveys; and while using this information to adjust, with all deliberate speed, school and departmental quotas and to reallocate resources wherever feasible in response to a changing market. We can use these Enrollment Management techniques while strongly resisting the idea of reacting to momentary fads by wholesale changes in the curriculum that depart from our basic commitment to a liberal arts tradition.

In summary, there is no necessary contradiction between using sophisticated information systems to respond to shifting student needs and maintaining a humanistic vision of what fundamentally constitutes a good education.
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**Financial aid strategy**

*Boston College must implement financial aid strategies that will optimize our ability to attract and retain an appropriate socio-economic mix of students.*

The University is justifiably proud that it maintains one of the largest federal financial aid programs in the country, coupled with a generous institutional allotment for scholarships and grants. However, with the soaring cost of private higher education in the 1970s (annual resident student expenses at Boston College are now well in excess of $5,000), these monies do not approach meeting the cumulative need of approximately 40 percent of our student body receiving aid. Given a continued commitment to the principle that only those who demonstrate financial need shall be eligible for aid, how does an institution with limited resources package awards in a fair and efficient way to achieve institutional goals? Among these goals are, most pragmatically, meeting overall enrollment objectives with the most qualified student body possible, and obtaining an appropriate distribution of minorities, women, commuters, low- and middle-income applicants, etc.

This is an enormously complex problem and there are no ready answers, either in the literature or in existing institutional models. Harvard has the endowment to meet the full need of all accepted applicants, while those schools unable to achieve full enrollments often unabashedly lure students with no-need scholarships, tuition discounts, and other even more questionable practices. One enterprising college in the Midwest, for example, randomly released thousands of helium balloons containing cards promising scholarships to (presumably qualified) people who found them.

One of the foremost goals of the Enrollment Management Program here is the development of mathematical models that will, in the aggregate, yield the best possible mix of students at a reasonable institutional expense, recognizing that we cannot meet full needs in most cases. The phrase “in the aggregate” is emphasized to underscore our belief that no computerized system can cope with a multitude of individual exceptions and that these should be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Significant progress has already been made in sorting out financial aid options such as: 1) flat across-the-board percentages for all; 2) most- to least-needy aided consecutively until funds are completely expended; 3) underfunding of all by a fixed amount; and 4) highest academic quality aided first. These results will soon be reported in a doctoral thesis at the University. There is already a strong indication that many of the national practices prevalent today in determining financial need and awarding aid will be called into serious question.

**Retention — transfer**

*Boston College must formalize a retention program to identify reasons for attrition and to minimize this to whatever extent possible.*

Every year, for a variety of extremely complex reasons, hundreds of undergraduates leave Boston College before graduating. This past year approximately seven percent (net) departed, in most cases voluntarily by dropping-out, stopping-out, or transferring elsewhere; in some instances involuntarily through academic dismissal. We can take only small consolation in the knowledge that the national average is close to 25 percent.

Many of these students left us for compelling, positive reasons over which we can and should exert little control. As mentioned previously, the national transfer movement is growing, as a more mobile population of college students seeks educational and geographical di-
versity. Some students here redefine their
career objectives and move in directions
where we can no longer support their in-
dividual needs, such as forestry or ar-
chitecture. In these instances, we have an
obligation not only to eliminate serious
administrative roadblocks to their depar-
ture, but also to provide counseling and
other positive assistance to facilitate
smooth transition. Concrete steps have
already been taken at Boston College to
provide both formal administrative
channels and a successful peer counsel-
ing service.

It must also be acknowledged that there
are students who depart, confused and
unhappy, for all the wrong reasons. And
there are some who never should have
come here in the first place, either be-
cause they were never properly moti-
vated or because there was a basic mis-
mismatch between them and the University
community. In these cases, the institution
must respond by adjusting aid packages,
solving housing problems, increasing the
availability of courses, improving the
admissions selection process, and in a
variety of other ways.

Through surveys and exit and admissions
interviews, we must continuously
monitor the reasonable criticisms by
present students and those on the verge of
leaving, to feedback this information back into
admissions policy and improve other
University services whenever there is
clear indication that this is necessary.

Several years ago, the University made
the wise decision to become a leader in
the field of transfer admissions. Now stu-
dents by the thousands, mostly from
other private four-year institutions, are
seeking transfer to Boston College. We are
in the fortunate position, because of this
high demand, of being able to replace
those who leave us with a highly
qualified group of students who enrich
our community with added dimensions of
maturity and diversity.

With these opportunities, however,
there are also problems that require En-
rrolment Management solutions. In areas
such as course registration, priorities
must be established among native stu-
dents, cross registrants from other
schools at the University and potential
transfers. We must treat our existing stu-
dents equitably, while achieving enroll-
ment quotas and making the transition
into Boston College as easy as possible for
incoming transfers. Difficult decisions
must be made about financial aid alloca-
tions to transfers as opposed to present
students who claim they are leaving for
financial reasons. Our obligations and
possible strategies are not always readily
apparent in matters as complicated as
these.

Despite the obvious necessity and even
the advantages of a large transfer pro-
gram, Boston College is committed to
identifying and correcting those prob-
lems that provoke students to leave us. In
the final analysis, this kind of continual
self-study and renewal will contribute to
the health and stability of the University
community and reduce even further the
chance that we will ever become a school
with revolving doors, unable to achieve
enrollment objectives.

Clearly, the five goals of Enrollment
Management are fluid and overlapping.

Massachusetts' unique resource

While pursuing an aggressive pro-
gram of Enrollment Management, as described
by Dean Maguire in the previous article,
the University also works to maintain its
healthy position by active participation
in the Association of Independent Col-
leges and Universities in Massachusetts
(AICUM).

AICUM was established in 1967 and its
56 member institutions are dedicated to
preserving and strengthening higher
education in this state and helping to
create a climate in which the resources of
privately-supported higher education
may be utilized to the fullest extent by
Massachusetts students and citizens.

Boston College has had a strong affilia-
tion with AICUM, beginning in the mid-
1960s when Michael P. Walsh, S.J., then
University President, called other private
higher education officials together to dis-
cuss common problems. Since that be-
inning of the Association, the University's
commitment to AICUM has re-
mained strong, as shown by Fr. Monan's
position as vice-chairman of the 1976-77
executive committee.

The following is an examination of the
issues facing private higher education as
a whole in Massachusetts, some of the
plans of AICUM members to meet the
challenges raised by them, and ways in
which Boston College alumni can pro-
vide assistance.

Massachusetts is the center of inde-
pendent higher education in the nation. It
has more than twice as many independent
colleges and universities per capita
as any other state, and the number in-
cludes eight universities, many
nationally-known liberal arts colleges
and colleges for women, and the coun-
try's largest number of privately-
supported two-year colleges and technical
institutions.

In 1975, according to the College En-
trance Examination Board (CEEB), Mas-
achusetts independent colleges and
universities received 10 percent of all ap-
lications filed by the nation's young
persons seeking admission to college for
the first time. In the same year, 58 percent
of all students attending colleges and
universities in this state were enrolled in
independent institutions — a higher per-
centage than in any other state.

While independent institutions here
have this national appeal, Massachusetts
and its citizens have been and continue to
be by far the major benefactors of the in-
dependent institutions. As recently as
1965, 75 percent of students graduated
from Massachusetts high schools were
educated in the privately-supported in-
stitutions here. Last year, despite the
growth of tax-supported higher educa-
tion in the state, 48 percent of the same
student group was enrolled in private in-
tutions — the highest figure in the nation. In the same year, Massachusetts’ independent colleges provided more than $25 million in scholarships from private sources to these students.

In addition to providing quality education to students from Massachusetts and other states, independent institutions here serve the Commonwealth by becoming involved in many ways in bettering the quality of life in Massachusetts.

Institutions and faculty, for example, help to solve problems in municipal government, ecology, economic development, school system improvement, and housing. Faculty members and staff are interested citizens and energetic participants in key community issues, as well as supporters of artistic and cultural activities in scores of the Commonwealth’s cities, towns and villages.

From a strictly dollars and cents point of view, independent higher education is one of Massachusetts’ most important economic assets. It employs more than 50,000 faculty and staff, has plant assets totaling $1.2 billion and endowment funds in excess of $1.7 billion. In 1975, its operating expenditures were an estimated $1.5 billion, including a $1 billion payroll — the equivalent of an industry having gross sales of more than $2 billion.

Massachusetts independent higher education is a major attraction for out-of-state dollars and at the same time an industry whose major expenditures are made locally. It is estimated that at least 60 percent of independent higher education’s 1975 $1.5 billion expenditures came from outside Massachusetts, while more than 90 percent of the funds were expended within the Commonwealth.

Aside from a small amount of scholarship aid granted to students and the financial relief provided by property tax exemption, of course, none of privately-supported higher education’s revenue is derived from state public funds.

In addition to the problems faced by all colleges and universities on a national scale, such as the end of ever-increasing numbers of potential students and instances of institutions having been overbuilt to accommodate those phantom students, privately-supported higher education in Massachusetts faces a new and special problem — the rapid growth of publicly-supported higher education during the past 15 years. In Massachusetts, since 1965, enrollment in tax-supported institutions has grown from 46,000 to 170,000, while the percentage of state residents attending these institutions has risen from 22 percent to 52 percent.

This development represents a problem for many students as well as institutions in this state. While the growth of tax-supported higher education has improved access to some students, especially low-income students, it now represents a serious difficulty for many students who seek a choice among all programs and institutions. This difficulty springs primarily from the growing gap in tuition charges in the privately- and publicly-supported institutions.

Inflation has forced independent institutions to increase tuitions regularly during the past decade — more than 100 percent since 1965. State-owned institutions, however, their increased costs offset by tax-supported appropriations that during the same period have increased from $44 million to $240 million, have maintained nearly a steady tuition rate. In 1966, for example, the average resident tuition and fees at state-owned institutions in Massachusetts were $267; in 1976, they were $380. The resulting price gap leaves little choice for thousands of Massachusetts students from families of moderate means.

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Some Massachusetts citizens shrug off the problems facing “expensive” privately-supported higher education and argue that state-run lost-cost educational opportunities should be further expanded. Such arguments reflect public confusion about the distinction between the cost of education and the price of education.

There is no way, in fact, in which publicly-supported institutions can provide education of comparable quality at lower cost than independent institutions. Indeed, while tuition (the price) at Boston College this year is nearly nine times that at University of Massachusetts, the true cost per student at the University is about 1,000 less.

Publicly-supported higher education, then, is not low-cost education. It can only be low-priced so long as the difference between true cost and what the student pays is subsidized by taxpayer dollars.

Massachusetts educational policymakers, citizens and taxpayers have two alternatives. On the one hand, increased tax dollars can continue to be used to expand low-tuition state institutions to provide increased educational access to Massachusetts students of moderate
means. Choice for students and the educational resources afforded by privately-supported institutions can be ignored.

The other alternative — a major opportunity for Massachusetts students and taxpayers — calls for a public policy commitment to mobilize all of the state's educational resources for the optimum benefit of Massachusetts residents. Its goal would be to increase both access and choice for all Massachusetts students, assured by new programs of financial assistance to students and to all institutions — both taxpayer- and privately-supported.

Such a policy would provide Massachusetts taxpayers with the highest quality educational opportunity possible for every dollar spent. Moreover, such a policy would encourage the development of two strong educational systems — one independent and the other state-owned — working together for the benefit of Massachusetts citizens.

Many states are already moving to provide increased student choice and to strengthen independent colleges. The Education Commission of the States reports that, nationally, state aid to independent institutions on the basis of amount per student has increased five-fold over the last decade and 190 percent in the last six years.

New York, which ranks second in the nation in terms of dollars spent per student in both public and privately-supported higher education, has a comprehensive program of aid, including direct grants to institutions and tuition offset grants to students in independent institutions. Illinois, which ranks fifth among the states, offers similar programs.

Pennsylvania, with a rank of eighth, grants $64 million in scholarships funds and provides direct grants to some of its privately-supported institutions. In a number of states, new programs of aid are being developed and existing programs are being funded at higher levels.

In contrast, Massachusetts, which ranks 31st, provides no aid to its independent institutions and little aid to its residents who attend them.

In 1974, Massachusetts voters acted overwhelmingly to remove all constitutional barriers to direct aid for its independent institutions. As yet, however, the Legislature has enacted no new programs. Aid to students remains limited to a small contract grants program for students in physical occupational therapy, scholarships for medical and dental and nursing students, and a general state scholarship program.

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From the general scholarship program, Massachusetts students in independent institutions here received a total of $7.5 million in scholarship aid in 1975. For each scholarship dollar provided by the Commonwealth for Massachusetts students, the independent colleges and universities provided an additional four dollars from their own resources.

There can be no further delay in reaching educational policy decisions and taking vigorous, responsible action in Massachusetts. The past decade has seen an historic shift of Massachusetts students into the billion-dollar state higher educational system. Meanwhile, progress in neighboring states in providing aid for students to attend their privately-supported institutions is exacerbating the already difficult position of Massachusetts independent institutions. Implementation of policy decisions and new aid programs will become increasingly difficult as enrollment growth slows in coming years.

Independent colleges and universities in this state urge state education policymakers and the Legislature to adopt the following four-point plan for higher education in Massachusetts:

Development of a rational master plan for all of higher education in the Commonwealth — a plan to avoid program duplication and construction of unneeded physical facilities.

Adoption of a policy to provide maximum access and choice for all Massachusetts students.

Establishment of a comprehensive program of financial aid for Massachusetts students designed to make both access and choice a reality.

Establishment of a program of direct institutional aid for independent institutions, as called for by Massachusetts voters in 1974.

Two specific programs to achieve the goals listed above have been proposed by the independent colleges and universities in the state to the Legislature through AICUM.

One would make matching funds available to independent institutions to help support their scholarship assistance of Massachusetts citizens. Under the plan, schools would apply annually to the state for a grant equal to half the amount of the institution's funds expended for scholarship aid to Massachusetts students. At least half of the amount received would then have to be spent on additional direct financial assistance to students from the state.

The second proposal is for a student tuition equalization program (STEP). STEP would provide each needy student attending a private institution with a maximum grant equal to one-third of the tuition at the enrolling institution or half the total educational and general cost per full-time student at the state university, whichever was less.

Using current figures for Boston College and UMass, STEP would provide a state grant of more than $2,400 to each Massachusetts student attending the University who requires such financial assistance.

Boston College alumni are in an especially advantageous position to understand the situation facing private higher education in Massachusetts. As graduates of a privately-supported institution, they are aware both of the benefits of an education gained at an institution free of limiting state controls and of the problems faced by institutions such as Boston College.

More than 60 percent of University alumni are residents of Massachusetts and therefore have a particular interest in how their state conducts and plans for higher education. BC alumni can join other Massachusetts residents who are alumni of independent colleges and universities in the state, and who together amount to 16 percent of the state electorate, in making known their support for programs that will help make Boston College and the other 55 privately-supported institutions in Massachusetts remain strong and free.

University alumni in Massachusetts can help by urging their legislator to support the matching funds program. House bill H.2060, and STEP, H.2430.
John F. Kennedy, then a U.S. Representative, joined students from Boston College and other Catholic colleges at the convention of the National Federation of Catholic College Students held on campus in the spring of 1951. Pictured are, left to right, Daniel Shea, '51, Kennedy, John McCluskey, '51, and Msgr. Cornelius Sherlock, '22.