The Council of Independent Colleges

Creating **Tomorrow's Institutions,** Together

2026 Institute for Chief Academic Officers with Chief Advancement, Enrollment, Financial, and Marketing Communication Officers

November 7–10, 2026 ■ Baltimore, Maryland

Serendipity is Not a System: Building Intentional Collaboration

Presented by



- Melissa Chastain
  Provost
  Spalding University (KY)

- Ryan Neal
  Provost
  Anderson University (SC)

- Chris George (Chair)
  Associate Vice President for Enrollment
  St. Olaf College (MN)



The Old System

How we used to do it

Developing and approving new academic programs

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

Monthly

Discuss ideas, academic priorities, feasibility

BOARD OF TRUST

3x annually

Formal governance and approval

CATALOG WORKFLOW

Asynchronous

Workflow, documentation, email notifications

It wasn't unreasonable. And most of the time, it seemed to work.

The Hidden Weakness

What could possibly go wrong?



Different people. Different purposes. Different timing.

Some duplication. Some gaps. No single shared conversation.

“

When did we agree to start that new program?

-VP for Marketing

She had been in the room when the Board committee approved it.

That question exposed the gap.

The Realization

I had presumed too much

COMMUNICATION

Information is shared.

→

COORDINATION

Information is shared.

→

COLLABORATION

People work together toward a shared outcome.

Institutions can communicate constantly and still communicate poorly.

And coordination alone does not guarantee genuine collaboration.

The Diagnosis

The gap was between the boxes

Launching a program crosses institutional boundaries

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS What should we offer?	**ENROLLMENT** Who will enroll?	**FINANCE** Does the model work?
INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH What data/reporting?	**MARKETING** How and when to market?	**OPERATIONS** What must be ready?

No single existing structure owned the intersections

Approving a program and being ready to launch a program are not the same thing.

The Response

APET: collaboration by design

Academic Program Evaluation Team

ONE PURPOSE • ONE TABLE • ONE CONVERSATION

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS | **ENROLLMENT** | **FINANCE** | **INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH** | **MARKETING** | **OPERATIONS**

Each area brings different questions and expertise. Together we build one institutional plan.

Explore → Evaluate → Plan → Sequence → Execute

Monthly

The Improvement

What changed?

Before		With APET
Information distributed	→	Conversation shared
Questions asked separately	→	Questions considered together
Dependency discovered along the way	→	Dependencies identified earlier
Timelines assumed	→	Timelines mapped
Individual offices informed	→	Offices jointly engaged

Shared understanding. Clear ownership. Distributed responsibility.

The Lesson

We didn’t need another communication channel

Board of Trust	still governs and approves
Academic Leadership	still provides academic leadership
Catalog Workflow	still documents and processes
Individual Officers	still execute

APET

connects
the work

We didn’t need to communicate more.
We needed to coordinate intentionally.

Collaborative Huddles

Standing teams that meet the work where it crosses offices

EMT
Enrollment Management Team

OSPRe
Office of Sponsored Projects and Research

The Starting Point

Tuesday Coffee Chat

Before offices can coordinate, they need to see each other's work

THE PROBLEM

Departments working in parallel

Offices lacked a shared view of one another's priorities and projects, so new information and open questions stayed within each department.

THE SOLUTION

One weekly conversation

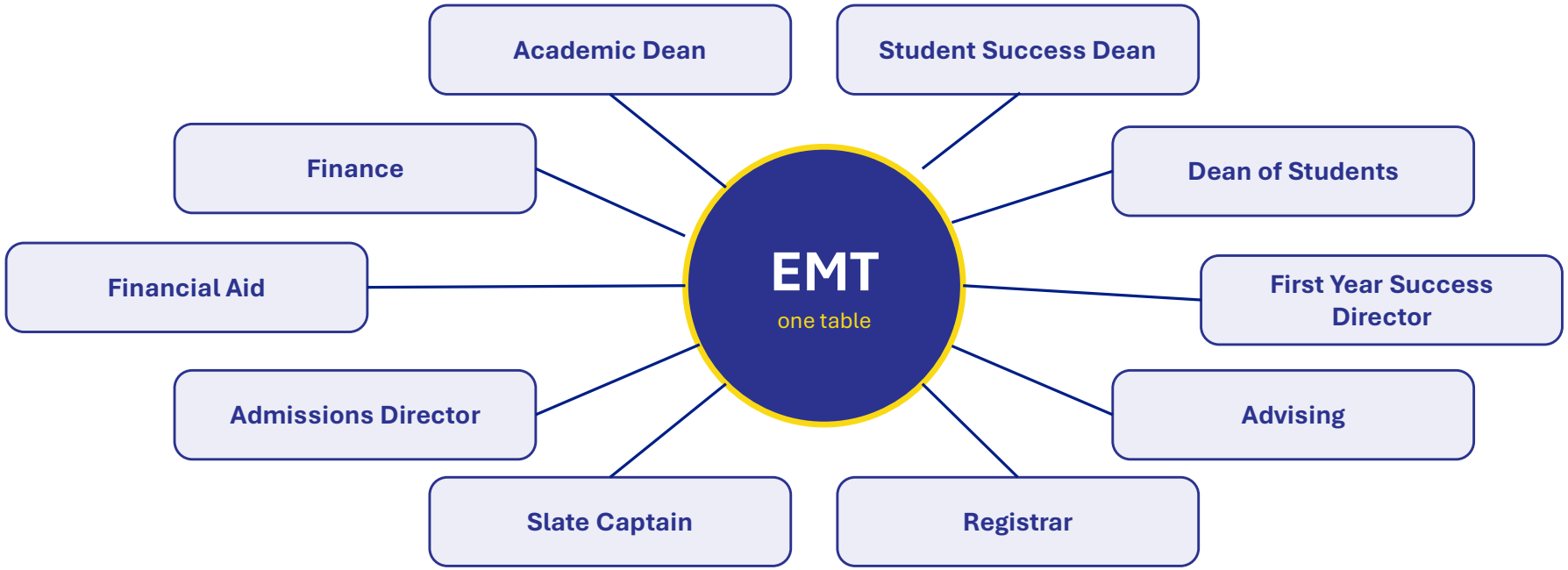
Every Tuesday • 9:15 a.m.

- **Round robin:** who is working on what
- **Share** new information across offices
- **Ask** questions across departments

The Huddles

EMT: Enrollment Management Team

Every office that touches a student's path to enrollment, at one table



The Huddles
EMT

Enrollment Management Team

CADENCE

Weekly

Standing meeting, every week

ON THE AGENDA

8 standing topics

Topics Discussed

- Retention
- Summer melt
- FAFSA
- Advising
- Account holds
- Incoming class
- Residence life
- New programs

The Huddles

OSPRe: Office of Sponsored Projects and Research

Grants work needed a shared table

THE PROBLEM

Grants conversations weren't happening

Without a regular forum, offices lacked clarity about grant funds: what was coming in, what was going out, and how the two connected.

THE SOLUTION

Meet regularly

Every week • 15 minutes • the same table

- **Common language** for money in and out
- **Common habits** across offices
- **One forum** for grants questions

The Huddles

OSPRe Huddle

Office of Sponsored Projects and Research • grants management across offices

CADENCE

Weekly

Standing meeting, every week

FOCUS

Grants management

AT THE TABLE

- Provost
- Grants Manager
- Finance
- Financial Aid

The Huddles
OSPRe

Office of Sponsored Projects and Research

CADENCE

Weekly

Standing meeting, every week

ON THE AGENDA

6 standing topics

GRANTS MANAGEMENT TOPICS

- Faculty pitching new grants
- Student scholarships embedded in grants
- Faculty buyouts
- Stipends
- Community partnerships
- Grants reporting

The Takeaway

Huddles keep colleagues connected

Short, regular and predictable, so the conversation happens before it's needed.

1

Touch base

A quick, standing check-in that respects everyone's calendar

2

Build relationships

Colleagues who know each other, and each other's work

3

Stay informed

New information travels across offices, not around them

Huddles don't add a layer of process.

They give colleagues a regular reason to talk.

Q&A



Thank you for attending this session!