

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Michele L. Sandlin
AACRAO Managing Consultant

During Ms. Sandlin's 32 years as a higher education professional, she has become well known for her industry-leading expertise in holistic admissions, admissions operations, staff management, campus partnerships, transfer policy and practices, accreditation, articulation, and graduate and international admissions.



William E. Sedlacek
Professor Emeritus,
University of Maryland

During Dr. William Sedlacek's career, he has consulted with more than 300 different organizations, colleges, and universities on interracial and intercultural issues, has published extensively in professional journals on a wide range of topics including racism, sexism, college admissions, advising, and employee selection and has received several awards for his research contributions to counseling and education.

Employing Noncognitive Variables to Improve Admissions and Increase Student Retention

Today, a growing number of North American postsecondary institutions are incorporating the use of noncognitive variables into their admissions process. Why is there more and more interest in utilizing these non-academic variables? It's all about success! The results at those colleges and universities that have added these measures to their admissions requirements are showing strong correlations to student's academic success, persistence, and graduation. AACRAO Consulting has packaged these variables along with business processes to effectively manage them within the admission process. Our name for these services is *FairSelect*.

WHAT ARE NONCOGNITIVE VARIABLES?

Noncognitive variables are based on more than 30 years of research by William Sedlacek, Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland College Park. According to Sedlacek, "The term noncognitive is used here to refer to variables relating to adjustment, motivation and perception," and can be assessed efficiently in a variety

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“Success is to be measured not so much by the positions that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles one has overcome trying to succeed.”
—Booker T. Washington

DESCRIPTION OF NONCOGNITIVE VARIABLES

1. Positive Self-Concept
2. Realistic Self-Appraisal
3. Understands and Knows How to Handle the System
4. Prefers Long-Range to Short-Term or Immediate Needs
5. Availability of Strong Support Person
6. Successful Leadership Experience
7. Demonstrated Community Service
8. Nontraditional Knowledge Acquired

of ways, and incorporated into any admissions process (Sedlacek, 2004, 2011). Noncognitive information complements “traditional verbal and quantitative (often called cognitive) areas typically measured by standardized tests. Noncognitive variables are useful for assessing all students, but they are particularly critical for assessing nontraditional students, since standardized tests and prior grades may afford only a limited view of their potential” (Sedlacek 2004; Lauren, 2008). The use of these variables in admission decisions has been tested within the US legal system and ruled to be viable.

DESCRIPTION OF NONCOGNITIVE VARIABLES

- **POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT:** Demonstrates confidence, strength of character, determination, and independence.
- **REALISTIC SELF-APPRAISAL:** Recognizes and accepts any strengths and deficiencies, especially academic, and works hard at self-development. Recognizes need to broaden individuality.
- **UNDERSTANDS AND KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE THE SYSTEM:** Exhibits a realistic view of the system based upon personal experiences and is committed to improving the existing system. Takes an assertive approach to dealing with existing wrongs, but is not hostile to society nor is a "cop-out." Involves handling any “isms” (e.g., racism, sexism).
- **PREFERS LONG-RANGE TO SHORT-TERM OR IMMEDIATE NEEDS:** Able to respond to deferred gratification; plans ahead and sets goals.
- **AVAILABILITY OF STRONG SUPPORT PERSON:** Seeks and takes advantage of a strong support network or has someone to turn to in a crisis or for encouragement.
- **SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:** Demonstrates strong leadership in any area: church, sports, non-educational groups, gang leader, etc.
- **DEMONSTRATED COMMUNITY SERVICE:** Identifies with a community, is involved in community work.
- **NONTRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED:** Acquires knowledge in a sustained and/or culturally related ways in any area, including social, personal, or interpersonal.

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Institutions engaged in measuring these noncognitive variables are showing positive results in better predicting students' success, regardless of their incoming GPA or test score. While high school curriculum, GPA, and SAT/ACT scores continue to be useful in measuring some aspects of students' abilities, a more comprehensive assessment of an applicants' potential can be made by assessing both academic and life skills. This approach is generally referred to as "holistic admissions" or in Canada as "broad-based admissions".

✎ USING NONCOGNITIVE VARIABLES ✎

Adding noncognitive variables to admissions requirements can provide better assessment of student ability and potential, while increasing diversity, and accounting for different learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Those institutions that have employed noncognitive variables find that they have learned more about a student much earlier, and that they can better serve the student once they have matriculated.

This affords the institution an opportunity, and more importantly, a responsibility, to serve the student more comprehensively, and much earlier in the educational process. This is an important part of why students are more successful once they matriculate. Campus faculty and staff can learn to help students be better prepared and informed on how to access and use campus services before they have arrived on campus. This greatly aids a new student's ability to be successful, and a more confident, self-assured student can result.

In addition to admissions, noncognitive variables have been used to improve scholarship selections as well.

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FAIRSELECT

AACRAO's *FairSelect* services help your campus understand and implement noncognitive variables. Michele Sandlin, foremost practitioner and a twelve year implementation veteran of holistic admissions/noncognitive variables, teams with William Sedlacek to work with institutions worldwide. They can assist your institution by providing information and training regarding theory, research, legal backing, question and scoring development, alignment with academics and student affairs, business processes, and staff training.



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