



W. Kent Barnds

Executive Vice President for Strategy and Innovation

Innovation and strategic planning

Barnds authors a quarterly newsletter, “Innovation and Strategy for the Small American College,” using his depth of experience and Augustana’s current Bold & Boundless strategic planning process to share key lessons and new insights — and to spark dialogue among college leaders during this challenging time for liberal arts colleges.

Oversight rather than supervision

As an enrollment manager leading smart, talented admissions professionals, Barnds knows the best solutions happen when people closest to the issue have the confidence to troubleshoot and solve problems. One example: responding to the rocky rollout of the simplified Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Service to community and college

Being involved in the community makes him a better professional on campus. Barnds believes senior college leaders have a responsibility to raise the visibility and impact of the college through their own community involvement, whether at the local, regional or national level.

W. Kent Barnds has worked in college enrollment for more than 30 years, starting as an admissions counselor at Elizabethtown College. From 2017-2023, Barnds was Augustana’s executive vice president for external relations, leading 70+ professionals with responsibilities for college advancement and fund-raising, alumni relations, marketing and strategic communications, and enrollment. Today Barnds is Augustana’s executive vice president for strategy and innovation.

He is nationally recognized as a higher education thought leader. From strategy and innovation to relevance and solvency, Barnds regularly contributes to the national conversation on challenges and progress in American higher education.

While his depth of experience helps Augustana to advance its mission through challenges, Barnds says his No. 1 job is to “preserve enrollment — because at a tuition-urgent institution, preserving enrollment preserves revenue, and preserving revenue preserves jobs.” In our “diverse and changing world” (to quote the college mission), preserving enrollment means innovative action during times of change.

For example, while many colleges cut programs during the Great Recession, Augustana’s administration added programs, both academic and athletic. Another example was the strategic priority to increase enrollment of international students, now representing nearly 20% of the college enrollment.

“I think innovation is largely misunderstood in higher education,” Barnds said, noting it is not always revolutionary. “In the classical definition, innovation means finding new combinations that add value.”

Barnds’ expertise prepared him to champion Augustana Possible — a financial aid program funded by the Gerber Grand Challenge that meets 100% of demonstrated financial need for qualifying newly enrolled students.

Augustana Possible drives revenue in two ways. “It’s attracting students we wouldn’t attract otherwise, and bringing in more endowed scholarships to support operations.” Barnds said. “That represents new combinations that add value — and that’s the work of innovation.”

W. Kent Barnds

Available for commentary on

- Three things that make a strategic plan successful: community understanding; community buy-in; and agility, or a nimbleness that allows the plan to “meet the moment”
- Wide-ranging market savvy and commentary as the author of opinion pieces, blog posts and articles in leading publications in the market, from Edu Alliance Journal to Inside Higher Ed
- American higher education as a *commodity* — given its standing as the most complex college and university education system in the world and the United States’ greatest export — and how taking this approach could lead to better support for education in this country
- Innovation and motivation in the face of “the demographic cliff” — in which lower birthrates in the United States have led to a decline in high school students — while many colleges give in to a mindset of “demographics as destiny”
- The “intersection of tradition and ambition” at schools like Augustana; while many colleges restrain action they see as deviating too far from tradition, Augustana takes action that can advance its mission through changing times
- What being a parent (with his wife, Jennie) for more than 20 years has taught him about the college search, and how it’s changed his approach to conversations with families

Professional experience

- Vice President of Enrollment and Communication, Augustana College
- Executive Vice President of External Relations: Advancement, Communication & Marketing, Enrollment and Planning, Augustana College
- Acting President, Augustana College
- Vice President of Admissions and Enrollment, Augustana College
- Dean of Admissions and Enrollment Management, Elizabethtown College, Penn.

Education

- B.A., political science, Gettysburg College
- M.S., management, certificate in organizational leadership, Regis University

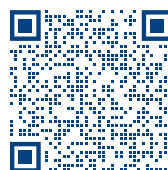
Board memberships

- United Way of the Quad Cities
- Davenport Community Schools Board of Education
- Tuition Exchange Enrollment Advisory Board
- EAB Enroll 360 Advisory Board

Sample publications

- “The Campus Visit is Changing,” Inside Higher Ed, 2024
- “From COVID Czar to Strategy Czar,” Inside Higher Ed, 2022
- “Called to the Moment: A New Vocation for Liberal Arts Colleges,” Intersections, 2020
- “Transfer Offers From Another College? It’s Not the Apocalypse,” The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020 “Private Colleges Need a New Agenda,” Inside Higher Ed, 2019
- “Finding a VP for Enrollment,” Inside Higher Ed, 2018

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