

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## MANAGING SENSITIVE CANDIDATES AND SITUATIONS: THE WORK OF SEARCH CONSULTANTS

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In our earlier article, we emphasized that because no two searches are alike, all colleges would profit from using the customized services of an executive search firm to recruit the best-qualified candidates for senior-level positions. If colleges and universities do so, they will save time and money while expanding their candidate pool. The executive search firm will ensure a thorough vetting process, assist with the selection of finalists and constantly manage contact with the client and appointee.

Contrary to popular myth, firms such as ours (Hyatt-Fennell) are not “headhunters” seeking merely to fill positions. Rather, our pre-search visits, institutional profile, position specification preparation, candidate recruiting and evaluative process ensure a lasting, close fit between candidate and the hiring institution. We are truly a firm that partners and searches for the best person for each position with every institution. Our credibility, contacts, confidentiality and complete background checks can also expedite the sharing of information not typically possible when using in-house human resource departments.

There are several other reasons to retain an executive search firm when sensitive situations exist in the process. Two of the most

common are Board-recommended candidates and in-house prospects favored by many internal constituencies, but perhaps not by the hiring manager. A third is composition of the search (interviewing) committee to create a balanced group that will fairly reflect the institution to candidates without alienating internal audiences. Everyone must realize that one person or group hires.

In the case of a presidential search, the Board makes the choice when hiring senior-level people. The president makes the final decision. Interview committees (search committees) are important to the process, but search committees do not have the authority to hire. Experienced executive search firms also work with candidates and hiring institutions to negotiate a successful contract.

***Seasoned executive search consultants will present well-qualified internal and external candidates.*** We often see excellent internal candidates who, for whatever reason, may not be the right candidate for the position. Sometimes Board members or close friends of the institution nominate individuals who they deem appropriate, yet are not the right fit. Internal candidates and those nominated must be treated correctly and respectfully and presented in a fair and equal manner with all other candidates. However, if the administration does not see or want them in the position, seasoned consultants can work with the internal candidate to appreciate his or her current value within the organization, or with the nominated individual to understand the strength of the other candidates, thus helping the institution to retain a valued employee/Board member/friend without alienating internal audiences.

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## MANAGING SENSITIVE CANDIDATES CONTINUED:

**Search Consultants can assist in the formation of search committees to ensure necessary representation from all constituencies.** In addition to culling committees to a manageable size, we can help the Board or President appoint the best committee members who will be able to ascertain the fit necessary for success. The search/interviewing committee must be able to work together, interview well, serve as representatives of the institution, and present the pros and cons of each candidate to the person(s) responsible for hiring for the position.

**Executive search firms can “broker” negotiations between candidate and hiring institution.** Consultants work closely with the candidates and the hiring institution to assure that there will be a successful conclusion. They monitor the wants of the candidates and keep them in line with the offerings of the hiring institution. Consultants work toward a win-win situation for both the successful candidate and the hiring institution.

Timothy Healy, SJ, the late former president of Georgetown University, said it best with regard to hiring senior-level candidates: “We are looking for God on a good day.” Competent professional executive search firms can work to help you do that. Good search consultants know your needs, your wants and your hopes. They can expand the pool and raise the quality of the candidates. A search firm can be your partner, your guide and your spokesperson. It will be your advocate for candidates as well as the one who does the requisite heavy lifting throughout the search process, from recruiting candidates to conducting thorough and complete background checks. Every stone must be found, examined, weighed and evaluated. An error can be costly if you hire the wrong person...whether you use a search firm, or whether you conduct a search without counsel.

The more views heard... the more details checked... the more investigation undertaken...the better the opportunity for a good fit!

*Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, has spent more than 35 years in higher education administration and search and is among the best-known and highly respected consultants in the field of independent higher education. She served as president of Carlow University in Pittsburgh and is the senior counsel to the Washington, DC-based Council of Independent Colleges. She has been an independent search consultant for more than 20 years, and has consulted widely*

*throughout the world, where she worked with many colleges, universities and non-profits. Dr. Fennell currently sits on three college boards and is the chair of the board of one of these institutions.*

*With almost 20 years of executive search consulting experience, Cheryl Hyatt has been responsible for successfully recruiting senior administrative professionals for educational and non-profit organizations. She brings 30 years of management and organizational leadership experience to her role with clients. Cheryl’s breadth of experience, knowledge and contacts make her sought after professionally in her field. Mrs. Hyatt also sits on various local non-profit boards offering a variety of expertise to each organization.*

*Both authors are partners in the Executive Search Group Hyatt-Fennell, a firm that works with not-for-profit clients with a strong commitment to education.*

## PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS: BETHANY COLLEGE CONFRONTS A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

**Dr. Scott Miller**  
President  
Bethany College

Founded in the rugged foothills of one of the world’s ancient mountain ranges, Bethany College is West Virginia’s oldest private institution of higher education — older, even, than the state itself — with its creation in 1840. Since its beginning, Bethany has earned a reputation as the only liberal arts college in West Virginia to have achieved national prominence. Its long history of resilient response to challenges confronting the nation — the Civil War, the World Wars, Great Depression and more — has developed in the College some of its greatest assets, including flexibility and a keen awareness of the changing realities impacting the liberal arts.

Today, when so many private colleges have been forced to change course in the face of significant economic hurdles, Bethany has instead remained true to its mission, advancing the remarkable vision of its founders while maintaining contemporary relevance.

Guided by a comprehensive institutional review completed in 2008 and a subsequent 10-year Master Plan, Bethany continues to expand strategically upon its educational offerings. As a result, student enrollment — the most vital indicator of college growth — has increased in quantity and quality.

## PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS CONTINUED:

Since the implementation of the Master Plan, total attendance has increased from 803 to 1,020, the largest headcount since 1976-77.

Among Bethany's recent transformative ventures is a series of vital partnerships. Drawing on its national reputation, the College has spearheaded a variety of synergistic collaborations throughout the country and across the globe. Such agreements work to provide greater service to students while strengthening Bethany's visibility and impact, directly affecting its enrollment efforts.

Bethany's latest enrollment-related initiatives include articulation agreements with West Virginia Northern Community College and the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. The plan establishes a Junior Year College Affiliate Program and Transfer of Credit Agreement that enables qualified Bethany College students to pursue specific Junior Year College Affiliate Programs at The Art Institute of Pittsburgh — and defines a path enabling graduates from The Art Institute of Pittsburgh to articulate seamlessly into Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science programs being offered at Bethany College. After completion of the Junior Year option, during which time Bethany participants study in one of 15 selected programs such as advertising, fashion and retail management, game art and design, hotel and restaurant management, or industrial or interior design, students return to Bethany to complete their senior year and all graduation requirements.

The College has also re-affirmed professional articulation, or "seamless study," agreements with Case Western Reserve University, Columbia University and Duquesne University, providing greater options for students with sights set on graduate school. Such initiatives also enhance Bethany's marketability and potential enrollment pool.

Students in Bethany's engineering program, for example, may choose to earn both a bachelor's degree from Bethany and a B.S. in engineering from Case Western Reserve University or Columbia University after completing a five-year sequence of study. Participants spend three years in the liberal arts environment at Bethany and then attend one of the participating universities for two years.

Bethany has partnered with Duquesne University in Pitts-

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burgh, Pa., to offer an innovative three-three program that allows students to complete three years of undergraduate work at Bethany and then enter the Duquesne University Law School for completion of the J.D. degree after three more years of study (four years in the Evening Division). Students earn a bachelor's degree from Bethany after successfully finishing their first year of the law program.

Significant expansion of distance learning and continuing education programs also offer increased marketing possibilities for Bethany. Students can now take summer online courses through Bethany's participation in the Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities. With up to 12 credit hours to choose from, this program enhances Bethany's course offerings and availability to students.

Bethany also continues to strengthen key ties with prestigious colleges and universities across the world. With strong relationships in 18 foreign countries, Bethany is moving steadily toward a global studies requirement. The College joined the

## PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS CONTINUED:

InterAmerican Consortium, consisting of seven American and 11 institutions worldwide to foster global collaboration for students, faculty and staff. Bethany also has an agreement with Harlaxton College in the United Kingdom in which 15 American colleges partner to offer a variety of innovative programs on Harlaxton's castle-like campus. Participants study British and European cultures and learn about them first-hand as they complete an extensive travel component throughout Europe.

Closer to home, exciting academic initiatives are flourishing. Business and economic majors, for instance, now have the rare opportunity to serve as investment professionals responsible for a \$1 million endowment as part of the McCann Family Student Investment Fund. As participants apply their classroom learning to the real world of investment management, with support from an expert advisory council, they gain valuable experience researching stocks, making responsible investment recommendations and executing trades. The fund, established by dedicated alumnus Robert McCann and his wife Cindy, made Bethany the first college in West Virginia to offer a student-led investment opportunity of its kind — and one of only a handful of small colleges across the nation to do so.

Bethany recently launched its first graduate degree, a fully accredited Master of Arts (MAT) in Teaching. This progressive program serves as a valuable enhancement to the College's ability to serve education majors and liberal arts graduates in all areas who aspire to teach. Degree-holding individuals who wish to advance their careers find significant professional development opportunity through the MAT, which also enables participants to acquire teaching certification in their area of expertise. The program coheres smoothly with Bethany's liberal arts mission, affirming teaching not only as a profession, but also as an act of service to the greater community.

Also visible on Bethany's historic campus are significant physical improvements tailored to the expectations of the modern student. In the past few years, the College has completed more than \$3 million in recreation and athletic enhancements, including artificial turf, lights, a rubberized track and field upgrades at Bison Stadium, a new softball field, expanded weight and locker room facilities, and a new 24-hour fitness center. The school also acquired and renovated the town's former Bethany School, transforming it into

the new Judith R. Hurl Education Center, home to the teacher education program.

To support growing enrollment, Bethany has expanded parking throughout campus and a \$4.5 million renovation of Cochran Hall, built in 1910, was completed in summer 2010. The re-opening celebrated the creation of modern, suite-style student housing for 72 additional students in the heart of the campus.

One more powerful example of Bethany's ability to strengthen its national and international stature by capitalizing on local resources is the College's equestrian offering, which utilizes the 160-acre Pegasus Farm Equestrian Center only four miles away. This award-winning program is a highly visible recruiting and enrollment feature, with more than 20 declared majors and minors and a membership of over 40 riders in the traveling Equestrian Club Team who earn top placements in competitions throughout the world. With the total of new students in each of the past three years comprising the largest classes since the mid-1970s, a current student population reported to be the most diverse in Bethany's history by federal standards, a much wider geographical representation than in past years and an incoming class academic profile that was the finest in 11 years, Bethany College is poised for continued success in this new era of higher education. At the heart of the College's enrollment strategy is its ability to draw upon and develop the energy inherent in both its local and global landscapes in a constructive, forward manner, allowing each to strengthen the other. This cyclical process respects the setting and values in which Bethany was founded while also developing the broad impact that gives Bethany its national and international significance, placing it among the best liberal arts institutions in the nation.

The challenges confronting the liberal arts and potential enrollment pool — including economic distress and an increasingly unpredictable job market — may limit the public's confidence in the power of a college education. But they also make the founding function and effective enrollment strategy of Bethany as a liberal arts college more necessary than, perhaps, ever before: to educate intelligent, informed citizens prepared to use their talents to benefit humanity as they honor their responsibility to go forth and serve the greater world.

## RETENTION: IT TAKES A COLLEGE

Tad Graham-Handley  
President  
The Art Institute of New York City

The majority of colleges and universities in America do not have the luxury of being particularly selective. By definition, then, the majority of institutions admit students who are not ideally prepared to succeed in higher education. Many of these students struggle to find their footing, and quite a few fail.

Any college's retention rate can be predicted fairly accurately given the demographic characteristics of the student body. I and many others have found that four factors are strongly predictive of lower persistence: Low socio-economic status of students' families; poor quality, on average, of high schools attended; a high percentage of minority students; and a high percentage of students who are the first in their families to attend college.

There are strong ethical, social and financial reasons to help students persist. The above notwithstanding, some colleges have better retention rates than others with similar student demographics. I would venture to guess that nearly all colleges have retention plans in place. Why do some work better than others? The answer lies in the culture of the individual colleges.

### A Re-Purposed Parable

Perhaps you have heard the following parable: There was a village by a river. One day a villager was looking at the water and he saw a body floating by. He grabbed a nearby stick and fished the body out. "I don't know whose body this is, but we ought to bury it," he told his fellow villagers. So they gave it a respectful burial.

The next day, another body floated by and the villagers fished that one out, too. It turned out the person was still breathing. The villagers bandaged him, fed him, and got him back on his feet. They felt good when the person got well.

In the next few weeks, more bodies floated by. Some of them slipped silently past in the night and the villagers never saw them. Others they spotted and fished out. More than a few they were able to restore to good health. They began to

specialize. Some villagers were good at transporting the bodies, others fed them, others treated medical issues, etc. They became increasingly skilled and efficient at dealing with all the bodies, conducting triage, burying the dead ones and saving as many of the live ones as they could. They felt good about the ones they saved.

One day, a particular villager got frustrated by the inexorable flow of bodies. She decided to walk upstream to find out how they were getting in the water in the first place. Her goal was to solve the problem at the source.

Traditionally this story is told to illustrate the difference between charity and social change: The work of the villagers represents the former; the villager walking upstream the latter. There is need in the world for both.

We can regard at-risk students in a similar way. Those who are already in trouble need help immediately. Think of them as if they are already floating down the river. Some are in financial straits, others are overwhelmed academically, some have relationship problems, some have gotten sick, perhaps a few have gotten themselves in conduct trouble, etc. Saving them is definitely worth doing, and we should keep doing it. We need to assign specific "villagers" to help these students, people skilled and efficient at addressing these issues.

Let's not forget that quite a few of our students are "floating by in the night." They withdraw without ever talking to anybody at the college. We need to get more skillful at spotting them before they drift away from us permanently.

We should also create conditions "upstream" conducive to keeping students safe, warm and dry in the first place.

### Creating Conditions to Help Students Stay in School

The primary opportunity to keep students in school is not financial, it is social. The most powerful motivator for students to persist is a web of positive connections with people in the college community, including other students, faculty and staff.

The reason these efforts work is that they help students to feel like it is not just a school, it is their school. To drop out is to disappoint people they know, who care about them. Withdrawing is tantamount to stepping out of the circle, away from the warmth and light of the fire. Therefore it is critical to create conditions whereby students will make such connections early and often.



## RETENTION: IT TAKES A COLLEGE CONTINUED:

First let's talk about positive early interactions with faculty and staff, which strongly correlate with improved persistence. (Incidentally, the opposite is also true—negative interactions are a big risk factor.) Here are some things that we have control over:

Instructors can have discussions with students outside of class. Virtually all such conversations are effective if they take place in a non-evaluative way. Examples include off-the-cuff conversations after class, drop-in meetings during office hours, or even talking informally in line in a coffee shop. Any time we show personal interest in a student's story, in his or her life, it flips a switch. We can all remember a teacher who did that for us. It feels wonderful when a teacher takes an interest in us personally. Whenever possible, even in general education courses — especially in general education courses -- faculty should encourage active, project-based learning. This is most important early in the program. It is conducive to student engagement. We can and should practice better pedagogy than the so-called chalk-and-talk method.

Faculty should personally call students who are absent, and let them know that it mattered that they were not in class. This is an extremely effective retention tool. Calling is better than e-mailing because it creates an opportunity to connect on a human level.

Teachers should identify students who are at risk of failing in the class and reach out to them “off-line” to see what help they might need. Faculty should practice compelling disengaged students to engage in a lesson, overcoming their resistance and rewarding them for doing so by respecting their contribution.

Whenever possible, instructors should design their courses to help students achieve incremental success. Acknowledging even small victories with genuine, heartfelt pleasure is another key technique for improving persistence among at-risk students.

The following elements help students come out of their shells and bond with their peers:

A longer more comprehensive orientation – This helps by providing students with realistic, accurate expectations about the program, but it also gives them additional oppor-

tunities to make friends. Social networking has enabled students to bond with one another very efficiently. Encouraging students to share their various on-line sites with one another is desirable.

Housing — Students who live in dorms persist better. It makes sense: Commuters don't have the same number of opportunities to connect.

Project-based Freshman Year Experience classes – When properly designed, FYE classes are centered around active learning and subjects that students are psyched about, like dogs, or tattoos, or music, or helping others. Getting students to feel good about something together is a very powerful retention technique.

Clubs and Organizations – Students who have a passionate interest about something often blossom in groups where others have the same interest. Research shows that this is especially true for minority students.

Peer tutoring – Not only does peer tutoring aid in the retention of those tutored, it also helps the tutors themselves to feel like they are an important part of the community. In other words, it improves the retention of tutors as well.

It is also critical that our staff and administrators treat students respectfully and professionally. Some students need a lot of help. That is our job, the very reason we are employed. Smiling at students and taking a genuine interest in finding solutions to their challenges helps them to feel like they belong here.

### **Saving Students Already in Trouble**

Our job is not an easy one. We enroll students who face a bewildering array of challenges. Furthermore, we cannot count on students to come to us with their problems, and we cannot rely on them to always tell us the truth when they do. It is embarrassing and stressful to reveal personal struggles to authority figures. This is yet another reason to make certain that every student has personal connections in the college community, go-to people with whom they feel safe.

What are the primary reasons why students withdraw? At my institution we analyzed the data, interviewed students and read a large number of studies about student retention. When you strip away the jargon and eliminate the one-offs, here are the three most common reasons for our students

## RETENTION: IT TAKES A COLLEGE CONTINUED:

to drop:

**Social and Family Problems** – To keep up in our programs, students must work steadily, and not just in the classroom. Meanwhile, their friends often invite them to parties they have to turn down. Their families expect them to pull their weight with child care, housework and even family income. Their romantic relationships become frayed, and sometimes they are even given ultimatums by their BFs/GFs/families that are not in their best interest academically. It is a lot to expect from a young person to stay focused on school in the face of relentless social pressures. They need to be reminded of why they came to us in the first place to keep their eyes on the prize.

**Financial Issues** – Our students are initially packaged for tuition and fees for the first academic year, but sometimes they are unable to package for subsequent years. Perhaps a parent has lost a job or family finances have deteriorated. Maybe a sibling has started college. Also, many students are unprepared for the inevitable weekly expenses of transit, meals and supplies for their projects. Their families face financial struggles already, and students are reluctant to add to that burden. In the absence of proactive intervention by financial aid administrators they remain unaware of any potential solution. They withdraw to end the pain and frustration of not having enough money.

**Academic Struggles** – Students do not initially understand how intensive college-level work is, nor do they know how important attendance is. Perhaps they were able to get through high school without being in class a whole lot. Although we tell them in the admissions interview and during orientation what is important, it doesn't have meaning to them until they experience it firsthand. Once their program starts, they get a little behind, then a little more behind, and before you know it the first term is over and they have failed one or more classes. They do not know how to get back on track. They are embarrassed. They feel like they have failed, and that is an unpleasant feeling they want to end as soon as possible. It is critical that an advisor talk them through what happened and what needs to be done about it. They need to know that this is not uncommon

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and certainly not fatal.

To improve retention, we need to become aware of students who are in trouble sooner, and establish protocols for what happens after we have found them. We have to fish them out of the river one at a time. The primary indicator that a student is in trouble is attendance. Our best opportunity to save these students is to call them every time they are absent. The most effective caller is the instructor. Next most effective are academic chairs, academic advisors and deans. The message must be that the student was missed, that it is important to come to class and that we care.

We can do these things, but we must be united in our resolve. Each of us can make a small difference, but all of us together can accomplish near-miracles. When we do, more students earn a degree, many of whom have never before achieved such a significant, tangible goal. When more students cross the stage at commencement, the eyes of more parents glisten. I love that.

There is little enough we can do for one another. Should we not do this?

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