

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 4 OCTOBER 1, 2012

A PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL COLLEGES

Dr. Jennifer Braaten
President
Ferrum College

At Ferrum College in Ferrum, Virginia we are most grateful for all the students who continue to be interested in attending. It has been an incredible period of growth for the institution over the years since I assumed the presidency. The College starts with an attractive core. We have the honor and privilege of having a powerful mission of affordability and accessibility. We are all educators interested in doing all we can to inspire and motivate young people. We have a faculty, staff and administration who appreciate what it means to offer an applied liberal arts program within an extremely challenging and competitive environment.

Many investments have been made to keep the College attractive and competitive in a difficult market. We implemented a comprehensive, new recruitment and financial aid strategy. New athletic opportunities have been added and a new athletic center was recently completed. The faculty have designed and introduced new academic offerings and revamped the Honors Program. A new residence hall has been built and we have focused in recent years on a number of green initiatives. The investments have paid off. Applications are up 127%, new student enrollments have soared 78%, the number

of students living in the residence halls has increased 106% and total enrollment has grown by 57%.

The good news is that we are a vibrant and welcoming community of scholars and learners, and that we continue to attract students to our institution. We so appreciate the enormous amount of effort that staff, faculty and coaches devote to recruiting, advising, teaching, mentoring and caring for our students in our classrooms and on our campus. The only reason students attend our private colleges today is that they still believe in the hope and dream of a comprehensive education that will help them secure a good job and that they believe the environment on a church related residential campus is caring, compelling and connecting. It is an imperative that we reiterate the message that we are here to assist students and families, that we are interested in them as individuals, that we embrace and "love" them and that we demonstrate that we are invested in their success. We are committed to helping prepare students to develop their personal vocational goals, as well as deal with global issues. We believe that we, and they, can have a transformative experience and that they, and we, can change the world!

It is still hot: We need to remain flexible and proactive throughout the year, and assure that any student interested in coming to campus will be accommodated and that we continuously reinforce the message that the college experience requires inquiry and reciprocity. It is important to ask each student: Who are you? What are you interested in? What are you proud of that you have already accomplished? What do you want to do in college? How can we help

ENROLLMENT MANAGER is a publication of Dwyer Education Strategies, Inc. Inquiries and comments can be emailed to dwyereducation@aol.com. An electronic version of the newsletter is available at www.dwyereducationstrategies.com.

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ON 100% RECYCLED PAPER.

A PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE CONTINUED:

you achieve your goals? New research indicates that character – not intelligence, quality of instruction, class size, family situation, etc. – is the crucial determinant of achievement in school. The old maturation/motivation/and money paradigm still is true – effortful practice, self-discipline, persistence and pursuit of long term goals are the qualities that contribute to the achievement character that can make the difference between success and failure for students at any level of education. We can still push “place and promise” as contributors to personal success as well as the opportunity to contribute to the public good. We have worked very hard to create an environment where such students can be successful, and we have a wonderful “team in place” who understand that we have a powerful mission to serve such students. As our Methodist presidents and pastors reiterate, we focus on the development of principled leaders who can change the world, and we recognize that the U.S. News and World Reports rankings do not begin to capture the significant work that we do.

Our work here is nowhere near done. We need to continue to refine our reenrollment and retention strategy, and we will be working on another layer/level of ensuring that student engagement is occurring in all facets of campus life and that there is assessment and accountability that focuses on getting and keeping able students at our institution. We do know that the “opportunity, accessibility and affordability” mission colleges like Ferrum will always struggle to increase retention and graduation rates because of the huge challenges that our students face, but we know we/they can do better. Mandatory Academic Resource Center and English/Math tutoring time is helpful; athletic study halls are invaluable, residence life quiet hours and community standards are critical, campus wide civility campaigns are essential, and campus religious and spiritual life opportunities are meaningful. We appreciate that student athletes (particularly women) continue to generally have higher retention rates than other students, and we know that community and bonding with a teacher/coach/mentor creates that connectivity in unique and wonderful ways. The same thing happens with faculty who challenge their students and staff who accompany them. We are grateful that we have started a wrestling program that has a very proactive and widely respected coach, that we have a freshman scholar

program that has attracted some excellent students and that the Honors and LOP program both have potential to grow. We are excited about a new international exchange program that will bring more excellent students to campus.

It is still challenging: Having just returned from NAS-CUMC, the president’s conference of the 120 United Methodist colleges and universities in the U.S., I have to restate the points I always make about the challenges we are facing as small colleges. This is not news, but some of us still may be in “denial” that this has been, is and will be the reality for the future. Quite frankly, there are no positive trends and so we all need to understand the dynamics of this reality so we can collaborate and work together to do all we can to offer a quality educational experience within a context of greatly reduced financial support from every sector. At Ferrum, we do have the “power of a positive community” and a strong heritage and legacy in the Methodist system, so we all need to be rowing in the same direction to try to counteract so much national and global negativity. Projections from experts continue to be that we will not have full economic recovery until 2020, and that students and families simply cannot afford private education and that any who do want to come to our schools, do so at great sacrifice. If they do come, we have to demonstrate the high value and good outcomes that their investment will create. We know it is not easy and this strains our institution and personnel to the limit, but that is why we keep working on multiple learning modalities, creative and contemporary curriculum, extensive career planning, additional career placement options, enhanced technology and social media connections for classroom and admissions/business office usage, increased internships and experiential learning, better marketing, stronger athletic programs, more student clubs, organizations and leadership experiences, extended payment plans and reinforcing that we are a community that has vision, mission and values.

It is the future: Only 8% of all high school students are interested in attending denominational small private colleges and this percentage is declining every year. The majority of graduating high school students today, and in the next decades, will be going to community colleges and public universities, primarily because of cost and convenience. Almost all 23 – 50 year olds will be seeking online education degrees and most states will mandate that students have several online courses before graduating from high school and many states are creating consortia and free online degree pro-

A PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE CONTINUED:

grams. The number of 18 – 24 year olds who want to attend a women’s college is 4% and those who want to attend a rural small private is less than 2%. We know that the minority number of births outnumbered the “majority” two years ago and that this demographic will continue to impact all of our institutions as these students will keep coming to college in record numbers, but will continue to be academically underprepared and economically disadvantaged. Federal, state and church aid has all decreased, donors are still skittish about giving gifts, drought will continue, food and energy costs will increase, many institutions continue to downsize, few give any raises, most have dramatically decreased benefits and all have suffered investment portfolio losses that will rarely be recoverable. Projections are for the average discount rate in our institutions to continue to grow, that the full-time tenured faculty rate teaching at all colleges and universities will continue to decline (it is now at only 33%) and that we will have more students per class.

And so where is the joy? It is here, and dwells among us. We experience it and we model it by our attitudes, words, and behaviors. We have the “blessing” of a community that encourages and lifts us up (in spite of rules, regulations, handbooks, litigation, guidelines, processes, and all other necessary prescriptive structures and order), we have a long history of overcoming adversity and we have each other. Let us show attitudes of gratitude for our students, their families, and the One who gives us life and love. We have to believe that we are “called to this work” and that we are “edge leaders” – more interested in meaning than money and that we have a broader purpose of bringing about the better world that God imagines rather than accepting the world we now see.

**Don't miss Dr. Jack Calareso discussing
Succession Planning:
Guidance for Presidents
at
The Council of Independent Colleges
Presidents Institute
January 4-7, 2013 in Palm Harbor, Florida**

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MARS HILL COLLEGE SETS NEW ENROLLMENT RECORDS

John W. Dysart
President
The Dysart Group, Inc.

A small, Christian college located near the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina is bucking all of the enrollment trends. Despite the declines in state financial aid, changing demographics, severe economic challenges and rising costs, this little College has been growing.

Dr. Dan Lunsford, the president of Mars Hill College, and his leadership team have placed the institution on the road to enrollment growth, program expansion and significant enhancements to the physical plant.

MARS HILL COLLEGE SETS NEW ENROLLMENT RECORD CONTINUED:

The College partnered with The Dysart Group, Inc., a higher education consulting firm headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina two years ago and a brand new recruitment plan was implemented, designed to actively communicate with prospective students about the benefits of the educational experience at Mars Hill College. Utilizing the telephone, letters and social media, prospective students were educated about the Christian heritage, emphasis on service, educational excellence and the close knit community at the school. *Seeing is believing* and the College has been able to increase visits to campus by potential students by 76% since 2010. The outcomes have been extraordinary. In just the last two years:

- Applications for admission have increased by 37%.
- The number of students accepted for admission has grown by 57% while the College has actually become more selective.
- New student enrollments have surged by 48% and overall enrollment at Mars Hill College is at the highest level in more than thirty years.
- The residence halls are full.

The phenomenon is not just a function of recruitment strategies and tactics. The College has been investing heavily in new residence halls, more academic offerings, new sports and improvements in athletic facilities, co-curricular activities, undergraduate research opportunities and additional faculty to keep class sizes small. Dr. John Wells, Executive Vice President, attributes much of the success to a detailed, well researched and outcomes-focused strategic plan. These enhancements have contributed to the growth. According to Dr. Craig Goforth, the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, "This record-setting enrollment is due to our wonderful location and the herculean team effort on the part of faculty, administrators and staff."



MAXIMIZING YOUR CHANCES FOR SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE SEARCHES

Cheryl Hyatt
Partner
Hyatt-Fennell

Marylouise Fennell, RSM
Principal
Hyatt-Fennell

In our first article, we discussed "derailers" which are often fatal to well-qualified candidates in executive searches and what those who seek senior-level positions can do to avoid them. This piece will highlight "enhancers" that will maximize a candidate's chance for success in the highly competitive market of higher education.

Doing your homework. You should study the website and become familiar with the institution and search committee members, academic programs, history and location. Conduct an online search of recent relevant articles about the institution and its peers in higher education as well as general circulation publications. Candidates derail themselves by asking basic questions which can be easily answered online and by confusing such fundamentals as the correct name of the institution and the exact job title. Work hard at finding people you know that know the institution and ask them questions.

Manage your electronic identity. Employers increasingly go first to candidates' online presence on Facebook and other social media sites, while also running Google searches, as a first step in the screening process. Check your phone message as well as any music that leads up to your message and watch out what your email address might say about you. Make the email address professional - "25 Beer Guy" did not get a position until he changed his email address. Please do not use your current position's email address, it is not appropriate. Make sure your presence reflects your fit for senior-level positions. This is not the time to be cute or foolish!

Submitting flawlessly-written CVs and cover letters. Misspellings, even small grammatical and punctuation errors and "wrong" homonyms are a poor reflection on you at this level. We suggest you always have a second set of eyes review your materials before submitting.

MAXIMIZING YOUR CHANCES FOR SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE SEARCHES CONTINUED:

Preparing thoughtful and insightful questions. Questions about such issues as mission and strategic plans (even requesting copies of the latter in advance for semi-finalists) show not just attention to detail, but signal genuine interest in the institution and the position. Semi-finalists should also inquire about upcoming audits and accreditations, tuition discounting, enrollment trends, percentages of tenured faculty, finances, fundraising and any crises in the last three years.

Get yourself onto college or other not-for-profit boards.

Such service will not only enhance your credibility with search committees, it will bolster your knowledge of the role of philanthropy and volunteer leadership within complex organizations. Everyone is looking for people with some development background for every position. Be sure you understand basic finance even if it is necessary to take some courses. Be sure you understand how to read a college audit.

Know who makes the hiring decisions. This step is critical in the “homework” process of interview preparation. If the institution is faith-based, this is also a critical factor in the hiring process.

At the interview itself,

Expect one or more “curveball” questions. Handle these professionally and calmly, without becoming defensive. The interviewer is more interested in the way in which you respond, rather than in your specific answer.

Don’t be afraid of gaps in the conversation. Silence doesn’t have to be filled immediately; pauses give you a chance to think and regroup for the next question. Many interviewers purposely encourage pauses to see if you will overshare. Resist this temptation. Closely related is this counsel:

As our late colleague Timothy Healy, SJ, former president of Georgetown University, used to say of high-level university searches, “We are looking for God on a good day.” Although you may not be able to achieve this standard, by following these suggestions you can enhance your authori-

ty, appearing more confident and capable to campus search committees.

Lastly, remember to SMILE. You should be pleased you have been chosen to come this far!

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 presently 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.

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.

PERFORMING THE POST-MORTEM ON YOUR ENTERING CLASS

Dr. Scott Miller
President
Bethany College

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
Partner
Hyatt-Fennell

Summer is over, a new class is comfortably tucked in and you can relax and celebrate your recent recruitment efforts while marveling at the numbers and the profile of the incoming class. Does this scenario sound familiar? So it is reported on many campuses throughout the country.

Now is not, however, the time for complacency. Rather, it is the time to evaluate this achievement and plan constructively for next year’s class. An enrollment-cycle post-mortem to analyze what worked and what did not can be essential to

PERFORMING THE POST-MORTEM ON YOUR CLASS CONTINUED:

ensuring future success.

Dr. James L. Fisher, president-emeritus of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), once said, “A college or university that is standing still is going backwards.” So often we hear of colleges that have a good year in enrollment followed by a downturn in the following cycle because of unwarranted complacency. Now, when the momentum is high, is the ideal time for the institution to plan for even greater productivity, rather than to make the too-common mistake of becoming caught up in the hoopla of today’s accomplishment.

Effective college presidents regularly demand a focused analysis by their chief enrollment officers. At the completion of each recruitment cycle, presidents should request an evaluation of:

- Overall numbers and the accompanying academic-preparedness profile;
- Effectiveness of financial aid packaging;
- Effectiveness of recruitment publications;
- Effectiveness of technology (including e-blasts, personalized URLs, the web and social media);
- Effectiveness of the call center;
- Effectiveness of the chief enrollment officer and director of financial aid;
- Effectiveness of all support staff;
- Effectiveness of staff travel programs;
- Productivity of college fairs and search pieces.

The bottom line is whether the process is producing desired (planned) results; if not, what adjustments need to be made? Only the kind of analysis described above can provide the needed perspective. Because objectivity is difficult when one is so close to an institutional process, we recommend using an outside enrollment consultant and/or formal research to hone next year’s “funnel,” staffing and procedures.

One effective president in the Mid-Atlantic region utilizes “Survey Monkey” to question students (and parents) who deposited but who ultimately did not enroll. The president then randomly calls some of the responders to collect additional data. He uses the same technique with students who

transfer to another institution. “The results are amazing,” he reports. “I get good, candid feedback, and from time to time we do get students to re-enroll after a disappointing experience somewhere else.” He indicated that he has used this approach successfully for more than a decade.

Another president in the Midwest annually uses an enrollment consultant to give a “fresh set of eyes” to the process. “We’ve had a successful operation for many years,” he noted. “But evaluative comments and new ideas always spark a better discussion when they come from outside the organization. Outside counsel can say things in a way the insiders often can’t.” He has utilized John Dysart of The Dysart Group in this capacity for nearly 20 years. Highly effective presidents go a step further. Always thinking ahead, they convene summer planning retreats to set the desired marketing tone on campus. They constantly challenge their campuses to look at new enrollment opportunities. Currently, that approach might include an innovative mix of traditional and non-traditional programs; online, three-year options in selected areas; and international and synergistic partnerships with “like-minded” institutions.

The president of a selective liberal arts college in the South proudly reels off a list of dual-degree programs with a highly selective private research institution that creates a “value added” for students. “They can take a prescribed curriculum for three years with us,” he notes, “then attend the other institution for 1 ½ to 2 years... earn two world-class degrees and be in the workforce within a shorter period of time, ultimately saving thousands of tuition dollars for his or her family.

The completion of a recruitment cycle often compels a staffing change. Presidents with whom we work add that this is the most competitive market in years for the recruitment and retention of admissions and financial aid leaders and staff. We recommend experienced search consultants to evaluate critical staffing positions as an effective return on investment and we are always happy to suggest specific consultants upon request.

Dr. Scott D. Miller is President of the College and M.M. Cochran Professor of Leadership Studies at Bethany College in West Virginia. Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, a former president of Carlow University in Pittsburgh, PA, is senior counsel for the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and principal of Hyatt Fennell, a Higher Education Search Firm.

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