

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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ANOTHER RECORD RECRUITMENT YEAR AT LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY OF ALEXANDRIA

John W. Dysart
President
THE DYSART GROUP

Louisiana State University of Alexandria posted another record year for recruitment. The institution implemented a new recruitment and financial aid model in 2013 and the results have been transformational. The outcomes for Fall 2016 are extraordinary:

- LSUA enrolled the largest number of students in history.
- Total student enrollments have increased by nearly 47% since 2013.
- The 529 new freshmen represent the largest number in history.
- On-line enrollment has increased by 64% in just the last year.
- The University enrolled a record number of students in its Honors Program.
- The University enrolled a record number of students

participating in dual enrollment.

- The number of international students grew by 20% in the last year.

This exceptional growth has occurred while state funding for higher education has dropped 39% since 2008.

PRESIDENTIAL PUBLIC RELATIONS: MAKING YOUR COLLEGE WELL KNOWN

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
Principal
Hyatt-Fennell

Dr. Scott D. Miller
President
Virginia Wesleyan College

For many years, Scott has had a quote taped to his computer from a longtime, nationally prominent presidential colleague: "I want to have the most effective internal communications in higher education. If we can start with this assumption... that will provide the platform for our external strategy. This belief in effective communications must drive our planning."

Former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill had it right: all politics is local. It follows, then, that successful public relations strategies start on campus. With most college CEOs spending more than two-thirds of their time on the road,

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PRESIDENTIAL PUBLIC RELATIONS CONTINUED:

internal communications can be a challenge. External stakeholders increasingly tug presidents in many different directions, and, if anything, the challenge is becoming greater as institutions compete for students and funding. Compounding the problem is that heavy travel can prompt faculty and staff to view the president as an absentee leader. Nevertheless, it is vital that campus CEOs communicate that they are visible, responsive, and proactive when on campus—and that they stay on message, regardless of the audience.

Dr. James L. Fisher, president-emeritus of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (C.A.S.E.), states, “From the presidential platform, the college or university president has the ability to mold public opinion, influence key internal and external constituents, and place the institution as a key to the improvement of society.” We therefore offer these specific recommendations for college CEOs:

Internal stakeholders are your front line. Ignore them at your peril. Properly valued, informed, and motivated, they can be your best friends in a crisis, an “early-warning system.” Disregard them, and no amount of external goodwill matters. In addition, internal audiences are your best marketers if they understand and can convey your mission and objectives. We’ve also heard remarkable stories of internal constituents leading to major gifts and national recognition for a college or university. For example, there’s the modest grounds worker at a private college who made national news by leaving the bulk of his \$1.6M estate to his employer of 30 years.

Be visible on campus. In their eagerness to promote their colleges, new presidents may miss critical opportunities for visibility on their own campuses. In contrast is the new president who is quickly exhausted running to every sporting event, departmental get-together, or student meeting. To reach a happy medium, a former mentor and college president coined the term “tasteful fly-bys,” referring to his habit of attending as many on-campus events as possible, but not staying for the entire activity. By being neither the first to arrive, nor the last to leave, you will be noticed and visible without tempting burnout.

Manage your own identity. In their haste to make their mark off-campus, presidents may attempt to brand their institutions externally before establishing their own

personal “brand” internally. It’s true that presidents *are* the institution off campus. Donors, media, and opinion leaders gain their chief impression of the institution from its president. But it’s also important that you know who you are and how you want to be perceived on campus before becoming visible to external stakeholders. Internal and external identities should be complementary and consistent.

Here are some other recommendations for inspiring internal stakeholders and capturing external attention:

Be strategic. Three marketing objectives well executed are better than a dozen implemented haphazardly. Ask yourself, “What is the biggest single need in our marketplace?” Then, “What can our college do better than anyone else?” Marry the two and you have a recipe for success.

- **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** In real estate, it’s location, location, location. In marketing, repetition and consistency of message drive results. In his 2006 *Messages That Stick*, author Chip Heath emphasized that compelling messages withstanding the test of time are succinct, concise, and surprising.
- **The medium is the message.** How often and in what format do your key constituencies prefer to receive information?
- **Add value.** What activity or program, if enhanced by 20 percent, would increase results exponentially?
- **Know your institution.** It’s surprising that when we ask longtime employees to give a “business card” summary of their principal product or service, they can’t do it. If you cannot deliver a crisp, compelling, 30-second “elevator message” to key audiences, don’t think further about branding strategies until you can do so.

Do it first. The marketing adage “It’s more important to be the first to do it than do it the best” runs counter to campus tradition with its endless committees. We are often reluctant to roll out a new course, major, or service until it’s been talked to death. By then, the window of opportunity may have closed.

PRESIDENTIAL PUBLIC RELATIONS CONTINUED:

- **Strike quickly**, making necessary modifications and adaptations along the way.
- **Capitalize on institutional strengths.** Successful organizations and leaders build on their areas of strength. What is your strongest feature? It's often more effective to add value to it rather than trying to introduce a new one.
- **Seek synergistic opportunities.** In the new era of philanthropy, organizations hunt creative ways to deliver their messages. By partnering with other like-minded organizations, your institution will enhance its donor base.
- Above all, **keep it simple.** Good marketing need not be complicated to motivate its audience.

“He who molds the public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions,” President Lincoln pronounced. Our 16th President knew the priceless value of positive messaging in effecting policy change. It helped him to preserve the Union; it will help you to build your institution.

#

Dr. Scott D. Miller is president of Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk/ Virginia Beach, Virginia. He was previously president of Bethany College, Wesley College, and Lincoln Memorial University. He is chair of the Board of Directors of Academic Search, Inc., and serves as a consultant to college presidents and boards.

Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, a former president of Carlow University, is senior counsel for the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and principal of Hyatt Fennell, a higher education search firm.

THE LIFE-CHANGING WORK OF GINGER YOUNG

John W. Dysart
President
THE DYSART GROUP

Enrollment Management is an important division at any

college or university. It is important because it addresses the very issues that define our purpose in higher education. We are, in fact, many things and seek to resolve many problems and accomplish myriad goals. But in essence, higher education is about teaching students, retaining students and graduating students with the skills necessary to become successful citizens.

Retention and graduation rates may be the most difficult challenges faced by the majority of colleges and universities in this country. For much of the higher education market, it is a continuous struggle working with students to just lead them successfully through the first year of enrollment. It is even more difficult to support at-risk students through to graduation. The work of the individuals intimately involved in this process for these colleges and universities is critical, life-changing and vital.

All of this is stated to put into perspective the extraordinary work of one individual at one small, private college. Ginger Young was the Director of Academic Advising at Freed-Hardeman University in Tennessee. She died on September 15, 2016. Her death was a personal loss for me, but a much greater loss for her colleagues and the

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THE LIFE-CHANGING WORK OF GINGER YOUNG CONT'D:

many students she served so well.

I had the pleasure of working with Ginger for a couple of years. While I have consulted with more than 170 colleges and universities, I have never worked with a more talented retention officer. That is not a statement I make lightly.

Ginger was in charge of academic advising at the University, but she was so much more. She was extraordinary.

Ginger helped all of her students set academic, career and spiritual goals as part of her advising sessions. She revisited the goals with each student during her advising meetings. She helped her students select appropriate majors. She encouraged participation in co-curricular offerings and suggested specific activities for students. She monitored academic progress for her students and intervened with coaching, academic support and general encouragement when needed. She collaborated with faculty and administrators to improve enrollment outcomes. She was the greatest advocate for student success I have ever encountered.

Ginger was able to effectively coordinate resources across campus to help students. She knew all the players at Freed-Hardeman University and insisted that she and her staff attend campus events and meet with all of the constituent groups because developing such relationships was critical when the time came for proactive intervention. I witnessed her approach one day while I was meeting on campus. Ginger learned that a student was considering dropping out due to an abusive situation at home.

- Within hours Ginger had met with the Director of Financial Aid who used her professional judgement to declare the student independent. The financial aid package was redone on the spot.
- She coordinated with Student Services to offer the student housing on campus.
- She met with a faculty member who offered to allow the student to live with her over the summer.
- She identified counseling opportunities for the student.

This is just one example; such actions were common for Ginger. Her work with students was more mission than job. Ginger loved her students and worked tirelessly to help because it was the right thing to do. There are literally thousands of students who benefitted from her passion, guidance, friendship, and mentoring.

TUITION DISCOUNTING: AN INSTITUTION'S FRIEND OR FOE?

Audra Kahr
Chief Financial Officer & Treasurer
Cedar Crest College

October 2016 begins an unprecedented time in Student Financial Services/Financial Aid offices nationwide. The launch of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) "prior year" release has made institutions pause across the country as they evaluate how to navigate through a new normal. There are more questions than answers as we inch closer to the enrollment cycle for fiscal year 2017/18.

Institutions know they are competing for a decreasing population of college aged freshman nationally, with some states experiencing a sharper decline than others. With fierce competition comes the expectation of increased institutional aid as a method to draw students. What does this all mean for institutions? Will they experience sharp increases to their overall discount rate as a result? Be patient – use discounting to your advantage and be nimble through the process.

The release of financial aid awards earlier has generally been well received. It provides students and families more time to arrange for payment or to look into alternative payment options. It is anticipated to relieve anxiety around the tight timeline for students to make their college choice. However, with more time generally comes more appeals, more re-evaluated packages, and eventually more institutional aid.

The tuition discount at many institutions has continued to grow annually. Gone are the days of low tuition discount rates and, in some instances, institutions are seeing a sharp increase in tuition discount. Sharp increases in tuition discount rates or increases that are not planned negatively impact an institution's overall budget. On the flip side,

TUITION DISCOUNTING CONTINUED:

tuition discounts, when managed properly can increase an institution's overall net tuition revenue. The key is having a pulse on the aid being distributed.

Institutions that have been working towards increasing overall net tuition revenue, through a close management of their discount rate, will have a close eye on the impact of this critical year. As my home institution begins to navigate these waters, I offer you the following advice:

- Communicate effectively to your students about the process. An informed student is one who will make better decisions.
- If you need assistance navigating the waters ahead, seek help. There are quality consulting firms who are primed to help you sail ahead.
- Be nimble – new processes bring about questions and new situations that will need flexibility.
- Be patient – all the answers will not be visible in the first year of implementation – you will need to tweak your process and/or your packages.
- Be smart -- use discounting to your advantage to drive net tuition revenue dollars.

Audra Kahr will be presenting at the upcoming "Optimizing Your Tuition Discounting Strategy" conference in Silver Spring, MD on December 1-2, 2016. Get more information on the conference by visiting www.academicimpressions.com.

LAMAR STATE COLLEGE- PORT ARTHUR ENGINEERS A RECRUITMENT MARVEL

John W. Dysart
President
THE DYSART GROUP

It had been a difficult period for enrollment at Lamar State College-Port Arthur. Applications and acceptances had been on a downward spiral and new student enrollments

had dropped nearly 50% since 2009. These trends occurred during a time of tight budgets and declining funding for public colleges and universities. This community college in Texas needed a real enrollment overhaul.

I had the pleasure of working with the new President, Dr. Betty Reynard and the newly minted Dean of Student Services (chief enrollment officer), Dr. Deborrah Hebert early last year to design and implement a brand new recruitment and financial aid model. We agreed to move away from the traditional "community college" or "two-year college" recruitment model and substitute a hybrid approach with tactics and philosophies more commonly used by private colleges and universities. It is an approach that emphasizes systematic personal communication with prospective students and data-informed decision-making. It was not an easy task as personnel and financial resources were extremely limited.



- A new structure was introduced for the Offices of Admission, Financial Aid and Academic Advising. It was impossible to fund any new positions, so several divisions were just restructured and available resources re-allocated. Job titles, responsibilities, hours and assignments were changed. A new Enrollment Services division was created.
- Concerned individuals from across campus willingly volunteered in the creation of a Recruitment Task Force to design and implement the new model. This team included representatives from both faculty and staff.
- The entire admission and financial aid paperwork processes were stream-lined and automated.

LAMAR STATE COLLEGE- PORT ARTHUR CONTINUED:

- The College announced a new scholarship program, new Orientation activities and a new advising approach, along with a new Leadership Program.
- The enrollment offices were relocated while work and visitor spaces were re-designed.
- A new financial aid award policy was agreed upon and the changes impacted both new students and currently enrolled students.
- Faculty were charged with creating detailed training materials including bullet point cheat sheets and PowerPoint presentations to better educate admission counselors on the elements of each major and offering. Particular attention was paid to educational technology and employment/ career outcomes.

Results after the initial cycle have been impressive. The outcomes have been encouraging:

- Total headcount increased 14%.
- New student enrollments increased by 30%.
- Freshmen enrollments grew by 27%.

None of these extraordinary results would have been possible without dedicated cooperation, effective leadership and hard work. Administrators, faculty and staff logged extra hours, broke down divisional silos and worked together collaboratively. Congratulations to everyone at Lamar State College-Port Arthur. The future for this community college in the hometown of Janis Joplin looks very promising!



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