

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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IDENTIFYING A FINANCIAL AID PROBLEM

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The financial aid operation at a small college or university can have an enormous impact on institutional success. The focus here is not on compliance issues, but on policies and procedures in the Financial Aid Office as they seek to support institutional goals regarding recruitment, retention and net revenue.

The following is intended to enable representatives in leadership positions to recognize warning signs.

- **Erratic/Unpredictable Institutional Aid Expenditures**

The idea that institutional aid expenditures are not reasonably predictable and controlled is erroneous. An inability to anticipate and manipulate institutional aid expenditures is a sign of inadequate planning, lack of procedural checks and balances and an indication that appropriate reporting and tracking mechanisms are not in place.

- **High, Outstanding Receivables**

While outstanding receivables throughout

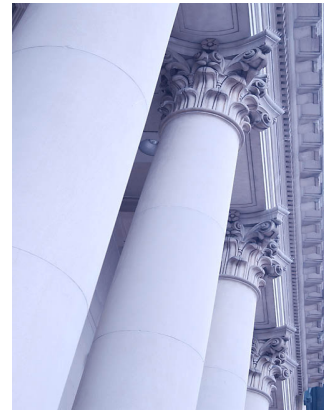
the cycle and at the end of the academic year can be an indication of poor collection practices, they can also be a sign of a problematic award policy. Many institutions operate with financial aid award policies guaranteed to place students and families in situations where it is virtually impossible to meet financial obligations owed to the school. Review your institutional award policy to ensure that you are not packaging your own collection problems. The implications for both recruitment and retention are real.

- **Pressure on Cash Flow**

At the beginning of the term, efficient financial aid operations have more than 98% of all financial aid ready for disbursement. This is true for both new and returning students and includes loans. If your institution is still processing any significant amount of financial aid after the first day of classes, you have a problem.

It is important for financial aid offices to take primary responsibility for ensuring that new and returning students apply for financial aid and (*see Identifying on p.3*)

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMING YOUR PUBLICATIONS

Marcia Nance
Vice Provost for University Marketing &
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Barry University

Every decision you make about recruitment publications should be informed by the results of solid market research. Once the

market research has been assessed and a brand strategy agreed upon, these four guiding principles will inform the decision-making and creative processes involved in transforming recruitment publications.

(*see Transforming on p.2*)

TRANSFORMING CONTINUED:

Guiding Principle #1

An effective identity program helps communicate that an institution has its act together.

This guiding principle comes from a case study presentation given by Linda Kohl, Associate Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs for Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Her organization was guided through its process of branding and marketing by Lipman Hearne. Kohl emphasizes “brand is a statement of the core value proposition of the organization and that graphic identity is the visual representation of the brand essence.” She continues by arguing that “all representations of brand – from the messages we stress when we represent our organization, to our logo, to our advertising campaign – are anchored by the key brand qualities.”

Shannon Kavanaugh, in her paper What’s Brand Got to Do With It? further promotes this concept when she states: “A brand is more than a logo. A brand is more than a façade or image. A brand is the life of an organization, defined by (1) brand positioning, (2) brand promise, (3) brand traits or core values, and (4) brand story.”

Brand position is about where you sit among your competition. Brand promise is what expectations are built upon. The brand traits or core values illustrate what the organization wants its brand to be known for while the brand story is the demonstration of your promise and core values. Every strategy, web page, marketing piece, stationery system, giveaway item and print, radio or TV advertisement designed, should be created to emphasize and reinforce these elements.

Example from the corporate sector: Southwest Airlines re-branded a few years ago. Their new identity includes red and blue airplanes while the focus of their message is now about convenience, service, on-time flights and fewer lost bags rather than about being an inexpensive option. In my estimation they didn’t pay enough attention to their whole identity program when they chose not to paint all their planes red and blue. As a result, some of their planes are the old orange and brown and some are the new red and blue in sync with their new marketing. I personally don’t want to fly in an orange and brown plane. It seems like it might be older and not as good. I question whether Southwest Airlines is as much on top of their game as they used to be because they are confusing my consumer self with two competing looks.

Guiding Principle #2

Market research shows that audiences attach important attributes such as quality, sophistication, and ef-

fectiveness to institutions with strong visual branding.

To avoid being the best kept secret in your marketplace you need to make a commitment to strong visual branding. According to Patti Crane, President and Founder of Crane MetaMarketing Ltd: “*What turns the promise into a viable branding program? The answer is at once straightforward and elusive: creativity. But creativity alone is never sufficient. In developing its branding an institution must ask three questions: Is the identity unique and differentiating? Are the benefits we’re offering important to our target markets? And is the branding defensible now yet sustainable long term?*”

I would add that you must be bold. If your market research leads you somewhere different than you considered or expected, you need to be willing to go there. If it is good market research you won’t be led astray. You can increase the respect your marketplace has for your institution through bold, strong, and memorable visual branding.

Example from the corporate world: Taco Bell – **Think Outside The Bun**. Isn’t that a perfect example of how four little words can own the marketplace?

Guiding Principle #3

Successful messages need to be noticeable, salient, persuasive, and memorable.

This is from Components of Successful Messages by Bob Sevier. He says, “*To make something noticeable through marketing you have to have frequency, consistency and use a multitude of mediums and formats.*” According to Sevier, “*There is clear evidence that simple messages repeated frequently are more likely to be noticed. To develop consistency,*” he continues, “*make a long-term commitment to a handful of key themes*” (core values).

He also contends that successful messages must be relevant or salient. According to Sevier, “*They need to strike a chord with the recipient, meet a need, provide an answer, act on a dream, or resolve an issue... because they were designed with the recipient, not the sender, in mind, they resonate.*”

Successful messages are also persuasive, the kind of persuasive that stresses relevance. Again, per Sevier, “*Because they were noticed and resonate, target audiences respond.*” Finally, successful messages need to be memorable. “*They are remembered because they make sense, meet a need, and are persuasive and simple.*” (see *Transforming* on p.3)

TRANSFORMING CONTINUED:

Another great corporate example is Nike's *Just Do It* campaign. The *Just Do It* ad first appeared in 1988. It quickly became both universal and intensely personal. It spoke of sports. It invited dreams. It was a call to action, a refusal to hear excuses, and a license to be eccentric, courageous and exceptional. It was Nike. The original campaign is now ensconced in the Americana exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum. It has truly become part of America's history.

Guiding Principle #4

Advertising is not brand building. That is the role and function of Public Relations. Advertising is brand maintenance.

This is the critical juncture of Public Relations (the stories) and advertising. According to Al Ries and Laura Ries in their book *The Fall of Advertising & The Rise of PR*, "You can't launch a new brand with advertising because advertising has no credibility... PR has credibility... PR provides a positive perception... Creating a brand and defending a brand are the two major functions of a marketing program... PR builds the brand, advertising defends it."

The goal of Public Relations is to get your core values authenticated by the media. When your publications become true demonstrations of your promise and core values everything you do is deepening your brand in the marketplace.

IDENTIFYING A FINANCIAL AID PROBLEM CONT.

complete their folders in a timely manner. Applications for all students should be tracked throughout the cycle. Representatives in the Financial Aid Office must take all necessary steps including reminder letters, postcards, e-mails and telephone calls to ensure that all students are packaged and ready for disbursement by the first day of class.

- **Disappointing Recruitment/Retention Results**

The role of the Financial Aid Office in securing new student enrollments and facilitating retention is significant. It is important to review the key elements of your finan-

Recruitment publications need to resonate with your audience – potential new students and their families. They must present to that audience an institution that has its act together. They should build upon a clear promise and real core values with strong and memorable visual branding.

Recruitment publications should always demonstrate, through stories, quotes, and testimonials, those key themes or core values. They should be presented frequently in a consistent graphic and branding identity. Finally, good publications targeted to your specific audiences will convert in ways that advertising simply cannot duplicate.

I've not found any existing blueprints for the development of specific recruitment publications. However, I know that when I apply these guiding principles to the creation of new publications those publications work!

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cial aid program for the impact on recruitment and retention.

Make sure that the dollar amounts of your scholarship and grant programs are sufficient to attract and retain students. You may need to make adjustments as tuition costs rise.

The timing of financial aid awards to new and returning students can also influence student enrollment. Awards to both new and returning students should begin by the end of the first week in January and it is important to set targets and track results. For example, seek to award at least 80% of currently enrolled students by the end of the Spring semester.

Examine process and paper requirements to find out if your approach acts as a barrier to students. The process of applying for financial aid can be intimidating for prospective students and parents. Procedures and paper require- (see *Identifying on p. 4*)

IDENTIFYING CONTINUED:

ments in the Financial Aid Office can further complicate the process. Complicated processes can delay the awards and actually discourage prospective and current students from completing aid applications. Complex processes may even discourage students from enrolling.

Make sure you have streamlined the financial aid process for both new and returning students. Reconsider the use of institutional aid applications and professional judgment forms. Make use of third-party documentation sparingly. Remember that additional documentation not only complicates the process and slows the awards, but extra documents in student folders can also increase the possibility of liability as a result of an annual, state or federal audit.

- **Excessive Number of Financial Aid Suspensions**

Carefully review your institutional policy on satisfactory academic progress. Schools are given significant leeway in the design of these policies and many colleges and universities make the minimal requirements harsher than they need be.

While you certainly do not wish to encourage students who are ultimately going to be academically unsuccessful to continue at school, just make sure your policies are not strict to the point that they unnecessarily penalize students.

Many of these pitfalls can be avoided by administrators in top leadership positions taking a more active role in financial aid policy and process. Vice Presidents for Enrollment and Vice Presidents for Finance should possess a specific understanding of the basic tenets of financial aid. The greater the understanding, the better the positive influence these administrators can have on the financial aid operation. In the meantime, it is beneficial to be able to recognize some of the signs that you may have a problem.

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MANAGING YOUR RECRUITMENT DATABASE

April Clark
CAS

Approximately twenty percent of the population changes residence in any given year. Further, only 4-5% of these people take the time to notify the US Postal Service of the move. These two facts can have a huge impact on maintaining accurate databases and keeping open your communication channels with prospective students.

There are few things more discouraging for college and university marketing or admission divisions than stacks of undeliverable mail. At least with returned mail, one has an idea of the extent of the problem. Consider that significant amounts of mail are never received by the intended party, but not returned as undeliverable. Similar challenges can occur with telephone databases. It is not unusual for college and university databases to have incorrect telephone numbers on file for as much as twenty percent of the population.

These problems can result in declines in admission applications, drops in recruitment yield and declines in new student enrollments. Databases must be updated and telephone numbers should be verified on a regular basis.

There are a variety of technologies available to update and cleanse your databases on a regular basis:

- You can update your institutional database using USPS "move" files. It compares your names and addresses to the changes people give the post office when they move.
- You can compare your records to magazine subscriber lists. A certain number of people will tell magazines where they move to, when they won't tell the USPS. Go figure!
- You can compare your files to the Social Security Administration deceased database to identify people who have passed away.
- You can compare your records to a complete list of all valid addresses to identify those that are incorrect.
- You can add physical addresses to rural route addresses as 911 systems expand and require physical addresses.
- You can eliminate duplicates by name and/or address.

The cost to generate inquiries continues to rise and the cost for encouraging admission applicants is even higher. It is important to take advantage of available technology to maximize the yield on these investments. (*see Managing on p.5*)

MANAGING CONTINUED:

Recall that reactivating even ten inquiries lost to a change in address or telephone number is likely to result in 10 applications for admission and the enrollment of an additional three students.

MAXIMIZING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIRECT MAIL

David Waggoner
Vice President
Premier Communications

Direct mail, properly utilized, can effectively project the impression you seek to establish with prospective students and can be influential in the college selection process. Quality direct mail correspondence can generate interest, encourage students to apply for admission and significantly increase yield.

Most colleges and universities budget a considerable amount of money to produce professional, 4-color recruitment literature. A great deal of time and effort are devoted to finding just the right words and images to create a great first impression, sustain interest and position the institution in a positive light. Unfortunately, not as much attention is always devoted to other types of correspondence. Don't make this mistake! Keep these points in mind:

- **personalize your correspondence**
- **use high quality materials**
- **present a consistent image and message**

Sure, it's easy to send out a letter addressed to "Dear Prospective Student" since you won't have to worry about matching the letter to the envelope, but what sort of impression does this create in the mind of the recipient? Colleges and universities invest resources emphasizing individual experiences and personal attention. This impression must be reinforced by a personalized approach to communication. Individualize all direct mail to prospective students and parents.

It may seem a good idea to reduce the cost of a direct mail series by utilizing a lesser quality letter stock. The quality of the letterhead used in a direct mail series, however, will either reinforce or contradict the impression of high quality you have sought to establish with prospective students. You may save a few cents on each letter by using a less expensive window envelope, but don't most bills come in this

sort of envelope? Is anyone ever happy to get a bill in the mail? Do you really want this sort of subliminal association in the mind of the person you're recruiting? Pay attention to the quality of materials and print.

Even if representatives in the Admission Office are on the mark in these areas, their colleagues around campus may be unintentionally sabotaging the efforts. Research tells us that most high school graduates deposit at more than one school. Sending in a tuition deposit is just one step in the decision-making process – it's a placeholder used while prospective students make a final choice about where to enroll. The image of quality constructed over months of communication with a prospective student can be destroyed if the Director of Student Services or the Registrar's Office sends out poor quality communications in window envelopes that are not personalized. Often, representatives in other offices do not understand the importance high quality communication.

Representatives in the Admission Office should review every piece of correspondence and coordinate all communication sent to prospective students. They should work collaboratively with other institutional constituencies to discuss branding and image. The focus must be on a consistent message and quality is critical.

A direct mail campaign that emphasizes quality, personalization and is well coordinated can effectively support recruitment efforts.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO ENGENDER BOARD OWNERSHIP OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Dr. Jack P. Calareso
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Ohio Dominican University

Ohio Dominican University (Columbus, OH) is a four-year liberal arts institution, founded in 1911 in the Catholic and Dominican tradition. The university has over 2,500 students and offers undergraduate degrees in more than 35 majors as well as several Master's level, graduate degree programs.

(see Successful p. 6)

SUCCESSFUL CONTINUED:

Ohio Dominican has been engaged in a number of significant activities in the past several years. These have included a major commitment to technology for the campus, a change in enrollment foci, the decision to expand at both the graduate level and in non-traditional programs (on and off campus), a renewed emphasis on pre-eminence and academic quality, the expansion of athletic and co-curricular programs, and the first new facilities projects in over 20 years.

Under the leadership of the current Chairperson, the Board took a significant step towards moving the from an oversight role of the institution's Strategic Plan to a deeper level of engagement and ownership of the Plan and its implementation. The Board engaged in a two-day retreat and has engaged in similar retreats every two years.

The results of these intense experiences have been a deeper and wider level of understanding and ownership by all Trustees in the key issues of the university; a clear and more complete delineation of critical issues for subsequent Board and committee activity and discussion; and, defined measures for assessment and accountability related to plan implementation.

The following are the underlying premises for this article:

1. Strategic Planning is a critical element to the growth and development of a university;
2. Strategic Planning needs to involve all constituencies, especially the Board of Trustees; and,
3. The success of the implementation of the university's Strategic Plan will correlate with the degree of ownership of and engagement in the Plan by the Board of Trustees.

Higher education is in the midst of extraordinary change. The academy faces evolving student demographics, the impact of the information age, decreasing resources and increasing demands, and greater visibility within an environment of significant accountability. While colleges and universities have always engaged in some form of planning, the current environment calls for the movement from "traditional planning" to "strategic planning" (Rowley, Lujan, Dolence, 1997).

Strategic Planning is, "a formal process designed to help an organization identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements of its environment." (Rowley, Lujac, Dolence, 1997)

Strategic Planning is always mission-driven (Thompson and Strickland, 1996). In this understanding, Strategic Planning (vs. traditional planning) focuses on the nature of issues and an appropriate response rather than looking at problems on current understanding ("outside-in" vs. "inside-out" mindset). Strategic Planning is less specific, focusing on directions and state of being rather than specific items (Quinn, 1980). Strategic Planning also provides a different area of focus, "aligning the organization with the environment in order to help assure long-term stability and survival" (Gilbert, 1993). Finally, Strategic Planning is "an ongoing process rather than a time specific, single event." (Rowley, Lujac, Dolence, 1997)

According to Bryson (1995), the key to successful Strategic Planning is "the satisfaction of key stakeholders." Effective planning must take into account the institution's mission, history, values, traditions, culture and circumstances as they relate to students, faculty, staff, alumni/ae, the Board and its various external communities. "Participative planning is absolutely critical not only for developing the plan but also for implementing it." (Rowley, Lujac, Dolence, 1997)

According to the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), "insisting on strategic planning" is one of the central responsibilities of the Board of Trustees (1997). AGB defines this as ensuring that planning takes place and insisting that plans are used regularly for decision making. The role of the Board involves the recognition, promotion and support of planning; the review and approval of the planning process; and, participation in some steps of the process (AGB, 1997).

What is left unclear in the guidance provided by the AGB, however, is the level and depth of the Board's involvement in planning. It raises the questions about how and to what degree involvement should take place identifying the realistic issues of Trustee time, knowledge, commitment and expertise. This leads to the third and most important premise of this session:

There are natural and political impediments to deeply engaging Boards in Strategic Planning. It takes a good deal of time and energy. Meetings are difficult to schedule as well as a challenge for attendance and active participation. They require additional preparation and a commitment to reading/reviewing materials, study, dialogue, engagement, etc. These are the natural impediments.

Such processes bring the Board more deeply into the operations of the university. While Strategic (*see Successful on p.7*)

SUCCESSFUL CONTINUED:

Planning calls for a level of understanding and discussion that focuses on mission, values, issues, direction and the environment, it is impossible to avoid the application of the Plan to specific activities, personnel and the administration of the institution. Inviting the Board to function more closely to the line between policy-making and administration may be a political issue.

However, if one accepts the essential value and critical importance of Strategic Planning, engendering a high degree of ownership and engagement by all constituencies and stakeholders will be a necessary pre-requisite to successful implementation. Furthermore, because of the governance responsibility of the Board, its level of engagement and ownership will contribute to effective leadership, more pervasive external representation of the institution throughout the community, greater support for the President, more active recruitment of new Trustees and resources for the institution, and increased involvement in fund raising.

The Board began to engage in "retreats" in 1997. These retreats are planned well in advance, scheduled in the Fall and preceded by a good deal of work by the senior administration and the Executive Committee of the Board. The retreats are scheduled over a two-day period and begin with a social event to engender community building between and among Trustees and administrators. Participants include all Trustees and the senior administrative team of the university. The Board has engaged in four retreats with one scheduled every two years.

There are several key components to a successful Board retreat:

Trustees receive significant documentation prior to the retreat. The documentation typically takes the form of "briefing papers." These papers are prepared by the various senior administrators under the supervision and guidance of the President and the final review of the Chairperson of the Board.

Briefing Papers contain background information about a topic, issue and/or area of the university. This background information provides a summary drawn from the literature and provides the Trustees with a cogent and succinct update on the issue as it applies to higher education, institutions like Ohio Dominican, central Ohio, etc. It provides both a summary of the issue and the implications for the future.

The papers also include an assessment of the issue as it ap-

plies directly to Ohio Dominican. This assessment relates the issue to the institution's Strategic Plan, its performance since the last retreat, the issues confronting the institution in the near future, and the environmental issues and changes. Finally, the Briefing Papers provide data rather than opinions. These data provide the context for any proposals and recommendations for changes in the Plan.

Each retreat centers on key issues related to the institution and its ability to move forward with its Strategic Plan. The delineation of these issues is determined by the Executive Committee of the Board and the President, and form the basis for the retreat's agenda.

In addition to the relevant briefing papers, key issues are defined by a series of questions and statements that will be discussed, debated and analyzed by the Trustees during the retreat.

Assuming that the Trustees have read the materials, an attempt is made to limit the didactic nature of the retreat. The primary format is small group discussion that occurs in a series of sessions, each focusing on a key issue. Trustees are assigned to small groups for each session to ensure that all Trustees interact with the entire membership and that stronger "voices" are spread throughout the groups over the course of the retreat.

Each small group is facilitated by a member of the Executive Committee. Because s/he was involved in the planning of the retreat, s/he is able to help the group remain focused on the issue and to engage all Trustees in the discussion. A member of the senior administration serves as a recorder. A series of discussion questions are provided to encourage discussion. The President and the Chairperson of the Board move from group to group and serve as resource persons.

At the end of the small group session, a debriefing session provides for a report of major questions, areas of concern, areas of agreement and/or proposed action steps. These individual group reports ultimately become the basis for a holistic summary of the retreat.

By the end of the retreat, a summary is generated delineating the key issues raised by the Trustees. Because of this more in depth understanding of issues and the necessary actions related to implementing the university's Plan, the summary provides a clear roadmap for both the administration and the Board. This summary provides the basis for future agendas and a benchmark for assessing progress towards implementation.

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