

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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AN EXTRAORDINARY ENROLLMENT TRANSFORMATION IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

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Dr. Jack Calareso was appointed President of Ohio Dominican College in 2001. He immediately set a vision for the institution to grow the enrollment, increase the number of residential students, improve academic quality and better control institutional financial aid expenditures.

Total enrollment at Ohio Dominican University has increased more than 50% in the ensuing years. Institutional financial aid expenditures have stabilized and become predictable despite the significant growth. Net revenue has increased dramatically. The academic quality of entering students has increased and retention rates are up. The University has built two new residence halls as the number of students living on campus has tripled. This article will focus on changes implemented over the last several years to grow the enrollment, increase academic quality and increase revenue while controlling institutional aid costs.

The first step in the enrollment transformation at Ohio Dominican University began with the introduction of tactics specifically designed to increase the number of applicants for admission. University administrators agreed that success in achieving goals regarding growth and improved academic quality were tied to building the applicant pool. We needed more applications to increase the number of new students and larger application pools would allow for increased selectivity.

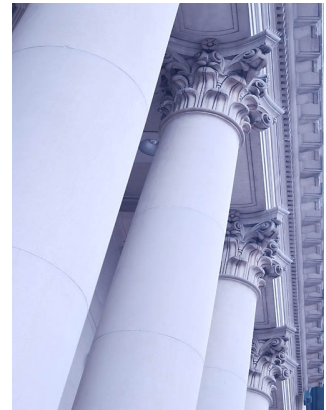
Systematic Communication with Inquiries

The University launched a systematic plan to increase contact with prospective students. Instead of the reactive method previously employed by the Admission Office, a proactive communication process was designed to reach out to these students and their parents. Appropriate messages were established at the beginning and all means were used to relay the messages.

A direct mail program was designed to educate students about the attributes of the institution. Letters were focused on the experiences of happily engaged, currently enrolled students and successful graduates. The stories detailed challenging academic programs and support, co-curricular opportunities for personal development and an emphasis on outcomes for graduates. Such materials were tailored based upon the intended audience. The message for high school seniors was different than the message for prospective transfer students. Parents were included in the communication plan. All written correspondence encouraged students to apply for admission and visit the campus.

A telemarketing center was established to speak with prospective students and parents on a variety of issues from financial aid to the benefits of visiting the campus. Permanent, part-time callers were hired to work from 5:00-9:00 each evening, Monday through Thursday, to telephone students and parents. Literally tens of thousands of telephone calls were attempted and completed to encourage prospective students to (see *Extraordinary Transformation p. 2*)

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

RETENTION AND THE ACADEMIC CENTER 5

PERSONALIZATION! 6

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS 7

CONTACT US 8

EXTRAORDINARY TRANSFORMATION CONTINUED:

apply for admission. Calls by telephone professionals were supplemented by conversations from currently enrolled students.

Campus administrators also utilized email to provide students with information and to encourage them to visit the web site. Obviously, the web site was upgraded with an eye toward providing the information most important to students and parents in a manner easily accessible.

New Scholarship Program

University representatives collaborated to design a new scholarship and grant program for prospective students. Dollar amounts were established in line with institutional academic quality objectives and budget imperatives. The merit program was aggressively promoted to prospective students and parents. The process for determining awards was streamlined to make it easier for students and parents. The new merit scholarship and grant program was specifically implemented in a manner to encourage prospective students to apply for admission.

Marketing

Marketing was critical in changing the image of the institution. The University had to be repositioned from a primarily commuter school to a resident campus. The perception of the University as an institution primarily engaged in educating adult students had to be expanded in order to attract interest and applications from high school seniors and traditional-aged transfer students. The institution incorporated:

- More Aggressive and Consistent Admission Marketing
- Improved Web Site
- Professional Approach to Public Relations

This repositioning was accomplished utilizing more aggressive and consistent admission marketing. New graphic standards for all publications were applied for consistency in message and design. The College made the transition to University status to expand its market. New co-curricular activities and athletic opportunities were added and advertised to supplement a focus on academic quality.

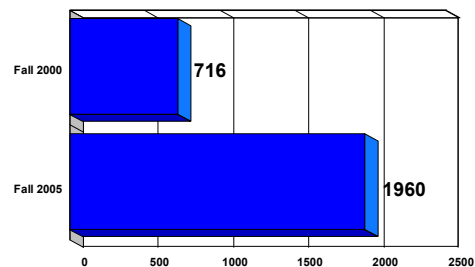
Significant improvements were made to the University web site. Content was updated and is continuously monitored. Constituent groups expected to make use of the web site were identified. Messages and information were tailored to

meet the individual needs of the various constituent groups.

Public relations were important. A plan was devised taking a professional approach to media relations and the results are impressive. The institution used to be mentioned perhaps 30 times a year in media outlets. The number of articles, stories and news pieces increased to literally hundreds per year and the level has remained consistently high over the last several years. Two professionals are dedicated to this task.

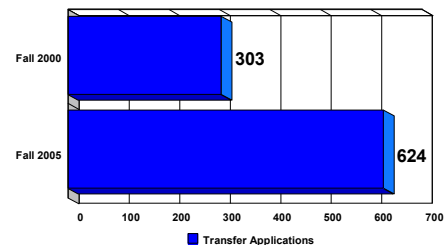
The University was extraordinarily successful in building the application pool. The systematic communication with prospective students utilizing direct mail, telephone outreach and electronic means created initial interest. The new scholarship and grant program served as an important incentive for students to apply for admission. The marketing campaigns helped reposition the institution. Freshmen applications for admission have nearly tripled over the last five years.

Freshmen Application Comparison



Significant application growth was not limited to freshmen. The number of admission applications from transfer students has doubled during the same period of time.

Transfer Application Comparison



(see *Extraordinary Transformation* p.3)

EXTRAORDINARY TRANSFORMATION CONTINUED:

The second part of the plan involved implementing tactics and structures designed to improve academic quality and increase the number of enrolled students. The role of the admission counselors was altered and weekly tracking mechanisms were established to monitor contact with admission applicants and outcomes.

Counselor Focus on Applicants

Admission counselors had formally been involved in many activities during the course of the cycle from significant travel to visit high schools and attend college fairs to calling inquiries and even providing academic advising for adult and transfer students. All of these other activities made it difficult for the counselors to spend quality time educating and influencing the applicants for admission. Travel schedules were significantly scaled back. High school visits by admission counselors were reduced by eighty percent. Detailed research was conducted to eliminate attendance at unproductive college fairs. Other University personnel were designated to register and advise adult and transfer students. The new structure enabled our best qualified people to focus almost exclusively on communicating with admission applicants. Admission counselors were charged with providing information, answering questions and assisting applicants through the admission funnel from initial folder completion through financial aid and deposit.

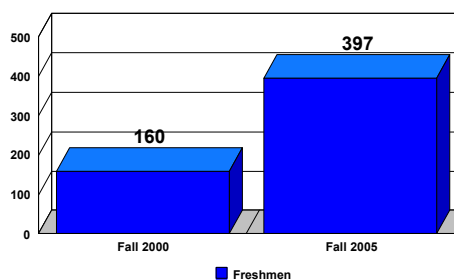
Tracking Contacts and Quality

It was not sufficient to ask the admission counselors to focus their attention on communicating with admission

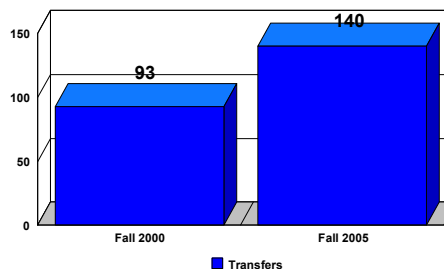
applicants. Counselors were specifically directed to have approximately one telephone conversation with each applicant every thirty days. In addition, counselors sent email messages to applicants every thirty days. These communications were monitored and tracked on a weekly basis. Reports tabulated contact rates. The quality of communications was also measured by watching the results of the telephone calls and emails. Conversion indicators such as folder completion rates, visit rates, financial aid applications, deposits and orientation registrations were calculated weekly.

These initiatives were successful in encouraging applicants to enroll. New freshmen enrollments have increased by 167%. The number of newly enrolled transfer students has increased by 50%.

New Freshmen Enrollments



New Transfer Enrollments



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As indicated previously, increases in the size of the application pool enabled institutional administrators to be more selective in the admission process. The average ACT score for new freshmen has increased from 19.8 to 21.5 and the grade point averages of both entering freshmen and transfer students have improved. (see *Extraordinary Transformation* p.4)

EXTRAORDINARY TRANSFORMATION CONTINUED:

The overall acceptance rate for freshmen has decreased by ten percentage points.

Financial Aid and Pricing

Revenue was a consideration as a key element in the transformation plan. The University sought to increase net revenue and control financial aid costs. Growth in net revenue was necessary to support growth in enrollment, improvements to the physical plant, academic enhancements and investments in co-curricular activities.

Pricing was immediately considered. It was determined that sufficient revenue would not be generated to support the strategic plan without a significant increase in tuition. It was agreed that tuition would be increased by 27% in the first year to bring revenue in line with the plan. A communication plan was developed to market the increase to all of the important constituents including faculty and staff, prospective students and current students. Adjustments were made in financial aid packaging to mitigate the impact of the increase. Planning was paramount. It is no coincidence that the largest tuition increase in the history of the institution occurred at the same time the University recruited the largest number of new students in history, the largest number of resident students in history and increased retention.

Long-term changes to the financial aid plan included the implementation of tracking mechanisms to monitor expenditures on a weekly basis beginning in January and continuing through the start of classes. This enabled leaders to make changes in the award policy throughout the cycle when necessary.

The Financial Aid Office became much more aggressive in encouraging new and returning students to apply for financial aid early in the cycle. Students were reminded by email, postcard, letter and telephone to apply for aid and to complete their financial aid folders after being packaged. Both new and returning students were packaged within 48 hours of receipt of their aid applications beginning in January. In previous years, the majority of students were packaged over the summer. Over the last several years, more than 70% of new and returning students receive their packages before the end of the Spring Term. This has facilitated cash flow, retention and recruitment.

These initiatives have served to transform the institution. The plan for transformation is critical. Ensuring appropriate changes in all of the relevant areas including recruitment, marketing, pricing, communication and financial aid is necessary. In many ways, the plan is the easy part. Implementation makes the difference.

Implementation

Finding the right people to implement all of the changes makes a difference. Colleges and universities often come up with great plans but the details are never placed into action and the results are thus disappointing. Such rapid and significant change requires a great deal of discipline and hard work, and the changes can be difficult for staff members and for individuals in management positions. Leaders must manage to results to be effective. Staff members must be sold on the new approaches. Reporting mechanisms to evaluate progress must be systematically reviewed. Ohio Dominican University capitalized on effective leaders and hard-working mid-level managers and staff members to maximize the results of a good transformation plan.

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RETENTION AND THE ACADEMIC CENTER

Shirley E. Arnold
Director of the Academic Enrichment Center
Brevard College

One of the hot button topics on college campuses today is retention! Today's college students love to flirt with transferring, as many of them do not have a strong commitment or allegiance to the college at which they matriculate. Students seem to change colleges on a whim: a girl friend talks her boy friend into coming to the school she's attending after their first semester apart; another student leaves due to a (perceived) lack of campus social activity; yet a third student never intended to stay in the first place; etc. Of course, there are always the students who talk transfer right down to the day before the next semester's classes begin, only it is just that: talk. So what does the college – in this case a small private liberal arts college – do to retain its students?

If only there were an "Easy Button"TM answer! You've seen the television commercials where the office worker uses the "Easy Button"TM to solve all the office problems instantaneously. Well, I want one to use on college students who think transferring after one semester or one year is the best thing to do. Press the "Easy Button"TM and the student sees that deciding an entire academic future on the basis of a high school romance is not the most prudent option. Press the "Easy Button"TM and the next student becomes aware of all the activities on campus that she or he had formerly ignored. Press the "Easy Button"TM and the student finally talks, really talks, to an academic advisor, finds a field of major interest, gets involved in a club, establishes some basic time management skills, realizes that the problems that dog him or her on the present campus are not likely to go away simply by moving elsewhere. If only it were that simple to keep students from making a capricious choice to transfer when staying put might be a wiser solution!

Unfortunately, though, we do not yet have an "Easy Button"TM to fix the retention problem. No single factor accounts for students' decisions to leave the college they have been attending, and no single angle of response can fully address the situation. A composite approach, combining academics and campus life and athletics and other key functions of the campus, from housekeeping to the president's office, is necessary. One valuable element in this compos-

ite approach, I think, is the presence of an academic enrichment center. Such a center provides students with a gathering place that offers them a welcoming environment in which to study and work on projects; it further incorporates support programs to enrich the academic life of the student. While the college library remains the primary place for professionally-assisted research and the quietest place for study, the creation of an academic center offers the option for study in a more casual and collaborative atmosphere.

The mission of an academic center should be inclusive of all students rather than focusing on those in academic difficulty – especially if one of the reasons for creating such a center is helping with student retention. The academic center should be as student-friendly as possible and appeal to a wide variety of students. The honors biology students working up their poster presentation for a regional conference should feel as at home in the center as the first-year math student getting tutoring in college algebra; the individual who wants to work on a research paper, with or without the help of a writing lab assistant, should feel as eager to go to the center as the members of the C. S. Lewis seminar who are building their model of the ship the Dawn Treader for use in a class presentation. Again I emphasize that the center is not in competition with the library, but rather complements the library's mission for students. In some cases housing the academic center within the college's library provides the natural merger of the two academic settings to enhance the academic life of students. When this merger cannot happen, then the two separate programs actively work together providing alternative settings for students to study. The academic center and the college library working together can go far in helping with student retention even if they are in separate locations.

The creation of an academic center provides "one stop shopping" for today's college student who wants everything at his/her fingertips. As such, it has a great deal to contribute toward student retention. The idea is to go beyond just the usual academic support programs – writing lab, math lab, tutoring, providing accommodations for students with learning disabilities – in order to include other aspects of programming that are important to today's student. For example, the academic center can provide an office for career services and build in programming for first year students that brings them in for career counseling and assistance in choosing a major. Such programming can be easily accomplished via an academic class, such as a First Year Forum, scheduled (*see Retention and the Academic Center p. 6*)

RETENTION AND THE ACADEMIC CENTER CONTINUED:

for a meeting in one of the academic center's study/conference rooms. Introducing first-year students early in the semester to the academic center for a specific reason not related to academic support eases the stigma sometimes associated with academic centers. The professor of a first-year class, in consultation with the career services director and the center's director, can use a portion of the course to introduce the students to the many functions of the academic center. When students can see first-hand the friendly, non-threatening atmosphere of the academic center, they are more likely to come again and use the center to study or seek tutoring help.

Another important way in which an academic enrichment center helps with retention is through its student assistants. When carefully chosen and trained, these assistants are the best advertisement an academic center can have, as they know first-hand the value associated with the central location for the various programs. Some student assistants serve as tutors for various subjects and/or conduct sessions for the writing and math labs located in the academic center. Perhaps even more important: student assistants can be like magnets as they draw in other students to meet them in the center to prepare for a class project, or simply encourage their friends to stop in when they are on the job staffing the center's welcome desk. Students visiting the center in turn witness their classmates studying singly, in twosomes, or in larger groups in a commons area or a study/conference room, with their books and snacks and beverages (in closed containers!) spread comfortably around them. The atmosphere is infectious, as the center becomes a hub of activity – a place for students to gather, and a visual reinforcement of the primary academic mission of the institution.

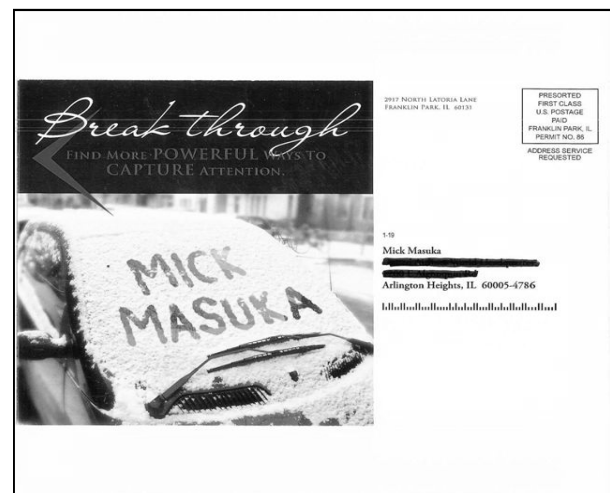
The value of peers in getting their friends in for an initial look at the opportunities and offerings of the center should never be underestimated. This is especially the case for those students who believe themselves “above” the need for academic assistance. Once such students see that even faculty members sometimes hang out in the center to talk about a class or a project or a paper they themselves are working on, the students are more likely to avail themselves of some of the opportunities that could make their college experience richer, more rewarding – and more lasting!

An academic enrichment center is no “Easy Button”™ for retention. But it can be an effective part of a comprehensive plan to meet the composite needs of today's college students for academic stimulation, career planning, study skill assistance, and general social connection. Such a center says loudly to prospective students and parents as well as to current students and their families, “We care – about you as a fully successful member of this academic community.” And let's face it: there can never be too many “We care” buttons on a campus, or in the world!

PERSONALIZATION!

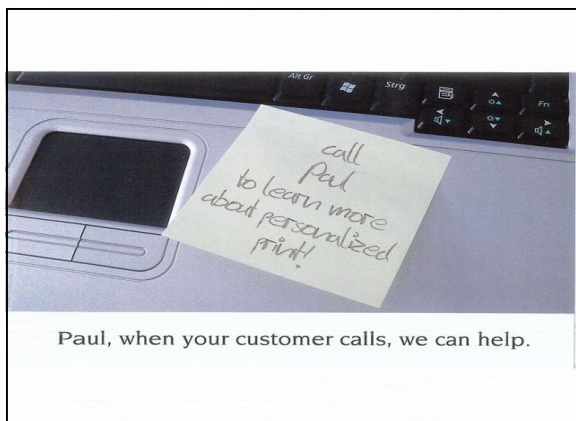
David Waggoner
Vice President
Premier Communications

Successful recruitment has become an arms race. Colleges and universities are continuously seeking to find better ways to communicate with prospective students. The personalization of communication with prospective students has evolved from individualized direct mail and specific messages based upon student interest to tailored web experiences. Well, you have to see the latest in personalized communication. Variable digital printing is the next phase. Imagine the ability to send color, picture postcards to students in a manner that personalizes the name and message.



The options are virtually unlimited. You can specify the picture, the specifics of the image, the message on the postcard—front and/or back based upon individual characteristics! (see *Personalization p. 7*)

PERSONALIZATION CONTINUED:



The uses for the technology are unlimited. It brings a fresh approach to student search. Individualized postcards could be so much more effective than the standard college or university brochure. The technology can be effectively incorporated into a direct mail series. Consider using the technology to encourage students to visit the campus. Influence students into participation in orientations. Feature athletic programs, specialized by individual athletic opportunity. Expose students to co-curricular activities. Emphasize the benefits of under-represented majors on your campus.

It is not too late to convert a few accepted applicants into Fall 2006 new student enrollments.

Variable, digital printing has become popular in business and industry over the last three years. It is still relatively new in higher education. Colleges and universities have the opportunity to take advantage of cutting edge communication tactics. Take advantage to super-personalize your communication with prospective students!



All readers are encouraged to submit articles to this newsletter on issues related to enrollment management.

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