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# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## WHY ADMISSION REPORTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group, Inc.

More and more chief academic officers are asking to be included on the distribution list of weekly admission and financial aid reports. Others, who may have been on the distribution list for years, are now actually looking at the reports! Academic Vice Presidents, Deans and Provosts are beginning to understand that their operations are directly affected by the outcomes for the enrollment management division.

Chief academic officers are charged with many important responsibilities at small colleges and universities. Providing appropriate leadership on faculty selection and retention, curriculum development, student progression, section counts and institutional planning are sufficient to keep anyone busy for sixty hours per week. Despite the already significant demands on time and resources, I propose that chief academic officers must become more knowledgeable with regard to recruitment and financial aid. Staying on top of admission reports and institutional aid expenditures is important to inform academic decision making.

The number and type of new students recruited each year is essential for academic, administrative decision making. Whether your institution is poised to grow enrollment, remain stable or downsize, the direction influences academic planning. Chief academic officers can keep an eye on overall recruitment trends by watching just a few comparative numbers. Monitor the number of inquiries (prospects), applications,

acceptances and deposits throughout the cycle. Tendencies in these four numbers are likely to indicate trends in new student enrollment. If the numbers are down, you may need to plan for retrenchment. If the numbers are up, you may need to think about additional faculty or at least increased course offerings.

These same numbers are vital to watch for academic quality. The key number here is the application count. Generally, the larger the applicant pool, the more selective a college or university can be. An institution seeking to improve academic quality is unlikely to do so unless it is able to significantly increase the number of applications. Declines in application counts may make maintaining current levels of academic preparation more difficult.

Specific academic quality can be monitored by looking at the high school grade point average, test score and class rank averages for both accepted and deposited admission applicants. Comparing these numbers throughout the cycle with the same numbers from previous years can be instructive. Levels of academic preparation can be useful to assist in predicting longer term retention outcomes, but are immediately relevant for faculty. Better knowledge regarding basic academic preparation can enable faculty to prepare instruction methods, remedial needs or high ability opportunities to meet the profile of the incoming class.

Diversity is important at many colleges and universities. Such trends can easily be seen in comparative format throughout the cycle. Monitor the (*see Admission Reports p.2*)

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THIS NEWSLETTER IS PRINTED  
ON 100% RECYCLED PAPER.

## ADMISSION REPORTS CONTINUED:

numbers regarding ethnicity or gender in the inquiry pool, as well as the application, accepted and deposited pools.

More detailed reporting can assist in the evaluation of current program offerings. Pay close attention to the comparative recruitment numbers of underrepresented majors. If you have certain majors where enrollments are declining, you may want to find out from your colleagues in enrollment management what specific initiatives are being undertaken to address declines in particular academic areas. Perhaps there are opportunities for more direct participation in the recruitment process from faculty in departments where enrollments are on the decline.

I often work with chief academic officers, aid officers and faculty who are considering program expansion or the addition of new majors or minors and am continually surprised by how often such decisions are made without consultation from the experts on the recruitment side. Your colleagues in enrollment can help you identify national, regional or local demographic trends with regard to student interest in particular disciplines. You certainly do not want to add programs when there is no evidence to support student interest.

As you monitor recruitment numbers each year, consider offering some faculty presentations to representatives in the Admission Office each cycle. Faculty are uniquely qualified to assist admission counselors in better understanding the laudable attributes of your academic offerings. How are your institutional or departmental approaches to teaching methods competitive? How has technology been incorporated into the curriculum? Are your faculty publishing interesting research or being recognized by peers? This type of information is not always effectively relayed to the people directly involved in describing the academic product to prospective students and their parents.

Keeping an eye on institutional aid expenditures can also be useful. Every dollar spent in unfunded financial aid comes right out of the operating budget. Careful stewardship of scarce institutional resources is imperative. It is okay to ask questions and increase your understanding of how your college or university spends institutional financial aid funds.

It can also be interesting to occasionally ask for information on the ability of your students to pay. If your student population is primarily from low income families, you should know about it. While there may be little you wish to do or are able to do to change the economic strength of the stu-

dents enrolled at your institution, knowledge of ability to pay is still important. Financial pressures are very real for students and can impact academic performance without proactive support.

It is not suggested that chief academic officers interfere or attempt to micromanage admission and financial aid operations. It is important, however, that academic leaders become more interested and knowledgeable on recruitment and financial aid trends in order to facilitate their own planning and decision making.

## HOW THE STUDENT CHOICE FUNNEL IMPACTS WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Marcia Nance  
Vice President for Enrollment  
Holy Names University

When potential new students and their families access a college/university website, they are searching for different kinds of information depending on the level of selectivity for an institution and where they are in the college choice process.

### Stage One: Review Information

- Just beginning to look at colleges
- Emotional
- WEB is important resource
- Beginning to settle on college choice characteristics

### Stage Two: Apply to a Few Colleges

- Becoming more insightful
- Asking better questions
- Informational
- Seeking more detailed information
- Benefits
- Outcomes

Goal: Cut college list down to manageable few and apply for admission (see Student Choice p.3)

## MAXIMIZE SEARCH RESPONSE CONTINUED:

calling an 800 number to (see *Maximize Search Response* p.7) request information. Filling out a reply card to drop in the mail is so "20<sup>th</sup> century."

The distinctiveness and impact of our postcards is enhanced because we create a personalized URL (PURL) for each card recipient by incorporating their name into a website address, e.g., John.Doe.YourCollegeName.com. Research has shown that when individuals see their name in the website address, it sparks their curiosity and they are much more likely to visit the site. In addition, the information and design of the personalized website accessed online is tailored for each prospective student based on information contained in the Search database. Both copy and images can be varied based on data elements such as intended major, geography, and gender. Personalization is further enhanced by pre-populating the Request for Information Form built into each PURL. You can see one for yourself at [doug.spadaro.mymonmouthu.com](http://doug.spadaro.mymonmouthu.com).

Finally, the reporting provided by variable digital postcards is extraordinary. Colleges are able to track in real time who visited the site, when they visited, who requested more information, who "clicked through" to the college's website, and all of the demographic information on visiting students available from the SAT, ACT, or other search sources. These reports are available on-line for your convenience. Better yet, all of the information on respondents is available for downloading. Many of our clients have been able to download these lists and incorporate them directly into their admissions database. No more keypunching the incomprehensible writing on reply cards!

### Results Speak Louder Than Words

As mentioned previously, search response rates utilizing old-fashioned search pieces and letters with reply cards average between one and two percent. Using personalized postcards, Premier clients have seen Search response rates as high as 7.5%! We believe that Variable data printing is clearly the wave of the future in college Search.



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## MAXIMIZE SEARCH RESPONSE CONTINUED:

mail with the unique aspects of the internet.

### Why the Internet Alone Does Not Work

Faced with declining Search response rates, many colleges have turned to email [as an alternative to direct mail] as a Search tool. This strategy is problematic for at least three reasons. First, only about half of the students who take the PSAT, SAT and ACT provide the testing services with an email address. Second, high school students are notorious for changing Internet service providers and many of the email addresses received from the testing services are out of date by the time Search data is made available to you. Finally, the emails which reach prospective students are often automatically or intentionally ignored as spam.

Today's college-bound students have grown up with the Internet as a basic necessity. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, they are overwhelmed with emails from friends and solicitations from businesses and colleges. Yet the tremendous success of Internet "chat rooms" is evidence that they have not tuned out. What is the difference? Email is a passive activity mainly comprised of spam which is largely ignored, while the chat room is a user-initiated activity – one in which they CHOOSE to engage. Given the fact that a college's Internet savvy is a key indicator to the student, the question for higher education admissions professionals now becomes, "How can we get the student to INITIATE Internet contact with us?"

### Combining the Reliability of Direct Mail with the Pizzazz of the Internet

Direct mail has become ubiquitous because of one fact: unlike email spam which can be eliminated by accident or by intent, it is guaranteed to end up in the hands of the recipient. This is why it is has become the backbone of advertising of all sorts. Unfortunately, its very success has resulted in an inundation of mail for most families. Although we know of many ways to make your direct mail stand out, we believe that the best method is a combination of direct mail and the Internet.

The answer is variable digital postcards bearing personalized URLs which offer a unique alternative to traditional Search methods. This strategy combines two channels of communication – the reliability of direct mail and the Internet.

### How Variable Digital Postcards Work to Increase Your Search Response

The first component of this unique campaign is the postcard. Unlike traditional press printing where every postcard produced is identical, variable digital printing allows us to use multiple images and varied copy in a single run for increased personalization. Each student receives a card personalized with their name and text that is specific just to them. One Premier client has created 10 different postcards for the PSAT Search. Nine of these cards are for prospective students who have expressed interest in specific majors, while the tenth "general" card is sent to the remaining records in the Search database. Other clients have utilized images and copy to personalize on the basis of gender, geography, and academic quality.



In addition to using multiple images and text, we utilize the strategy of "custom image personalization." We present the recipient's name on the face of the card as if it was photographed as part of the image, e.g., clouds in the sky, sand-writing on a beach, a theater marquee with their name in lights. The prospective student's name isn't just printed on top of an image, its part of the image. Your Search postcard stands out from the crowd!

The unique personalization of our postcards achieves your first goal – successfully capturing the attention of a prospective student. We then capitalize on our second channel of communication – the Internet. We do so by creating personalized website addresses and landing pages. This component of our strategy is effective because today's high school students have grown up with the Internet and use it for all manner of research and communication. They're much more comfortable going online to research a college than

## STUDENT CHOICE CONTINUED:

### **Stage Three: Select First Choice College**

-Have applied and been accepted to a handful of colleges

-Emotional

Will make decision based on:

-Fit

-Financial Aid

-The "cool" quotient

Considering the student choice funnel and very basic website development strategies consisting of multiple layers of web pages, **Stage One: Review Information** has a dramatic impact on website design and functionality. This is the time when potential new students and their families are just beginning to look at colleges and universities. They are making emotional decisions. The internet is incredibly important and great photography is worth its weight in gold. The ultimate result of this stage is to begin to settle on college choice characteristics. Some potential new students and their families begin this process when the student is in middle school, most begin when the student is in high school and some begin during the summer before the student's first semester of college.

What do they need to find immediately on your website? If they are part of the high selectivity group, they are going to want to find evidence of reputation and high outcomes. In addition to confirming the reputation of the institution and its graduates, they are interested in

knowing what type of student chooses to attend. In other words, are they like those students? Can they picture those students as classmates and friends?

If they are interested in one of the niche majors, like Pre-Med or Pre-Law, they will then look into your academic section, with particular interest focused on faculty. They want to know that faculty members demonstrate expertise and have a certain level of prestige. Again, they want to get a sense of how they would personally interact with their professors. These potential new students want the opportunity to rub shoulders with highly respected faculty who would recognize and develop their talents.

If they are not looking at high selectivity, or are perhaps first-generation college students, it may also be very important for them to find information that demonstrates how the institution might support their success. They are not only interested in programs that support their academic success, but also in a supportive admissions process and financial information. Again, at this stage, they want to get a sense of who attends the college or university and how they see themselves fitting in with that group.

If potential new students are searching for diversity, they are not looking for students who look just like they do. They are looking for students who bring different backgrounds, ethnicity and cultures to the mix. Diversity is demonstrated by all kinds of students, not any one kind. In other words, if you are trying to increase your Hispanic student numbers you don't just develop web pages featuring Hispanic students. You make sure every web page demonstrates diversity, not sameness. Diversity is about people coming together, not standing out because of differences. At this stage in particular, potential new students are not compelled to continue looking through your website if they sense anyone must stand outside the group.

Since website functionality is dynamic, not linear, the user chooses what to research first. As a result, the prominent feature is whatever the user chooses. Therefore, the key messages need to focus more on the big picture rather than on the details.

When all is said and done at this stage, no matter what level of selectivity or experience in the student choice process they have, potential new students are settling in on what they will consider their college choice characteristics to be. In other words, if you have not demonstrated why small classes are good, small class size may not be on their list of college choice characteristics and as a result you may not be in their college choice set. (see *Student Choice p.4*)

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STUDENT CHOICE CONTINUED:

What’s ahead at **Stage Two: Apply To A Few Colleges?** This is the stage in the student choice process when potential new students and their families are becoming much more insightful. They are asking more informational questions and seeking detailed information about benefits and outcomes. The goal of this stage is to cut the list of potential college choices down to a manageable number and begin the application process.

Potential new students are essentially looking for two things: (1) demonstrated benefits and outcomes, and (2) a clear admissions application process. This is the time when having graduates and alums who have achieved success highlighted on the website is an advantageous strategy. This is also the stage where the academic information needs to become more than lists of majors and faculty. Academic information now needs to be full of demonstration. Faculty who are experts in their fields need to be highlighted through their accomplishments and honors. Majors need to be explained, not only in terms of the courses one takes, but also in terms of the kinds of jobs one can attain with that major.

This is the time when the website needs to allow potential new students the opportunity to drill deeply into each area. In addition to finding out about what majors are offered and about the prestigious faculty, they also need to be able to locate very specific information on academics, like the academic calendar and academic policies that might impact them. They need to be able to easily view a tuition and fees chart. All detailed information needs to be readily accessible to them.

Within this stage, the admissions application process needs to be very straightforward and accessible at every juncture. In other words, the link to **Apply Now** should be on every page, not just confined to admissions pages, *i.e.*, when a potential new student drills down to the academic calendar, the sports schedule or academic policies, there is a link to **Apply Now** on that page. That is why creating a framework page with that information is a good website technique.

**Stage Three: Select First Choice College** is the final stage of the student choice funnel. This is where potential new students have applied to and been accepted at their selection of colleges or universities. This is again an emotional decision time. They will make their decision based on what they perceive as “*fit*”, the financial aid offer, their sense of the value and affordability quotient and the overall emotional

connection they have with the college or university. They want to be able to say with pride to their friends and relatives, “I am going to attend My Choice University!” or, “I got a great scholarship at My Choice University!”

This is a time when connection *souvenirs* and other information should be available for downloading. *Souvenirs* could include a map of the campus, a calendar of athletic events, a blueprint of residence hall rooms, a copy of the student handbook, etc. **Potential new students should be able to send a personalized My Choice University postcard to their friends.** All these items should be in the college or university “look”, in four-color graphics. This is also a time when they should have access to the college/university bookstore and have the ability to order T-shirts or sweatshirts and other logo gear online.

This is a time for the whole website to ooze with connection. Each student should have access to a personalized portal that is very current with their status and next directions to, and through, the next steps. Everything at this stage should guide them to enrollment as the natural next step.

No matter what stage potential new students are working through, to be effective a college/university website must be current, interactive and responsive to whatever they require whenever they require it.

BIG CHANGES IN FEDERAL STUDENT AID PROGRAMS PRESENT IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group

Significant changes have taken place in federal financial aid programs in recent years and even more changes are currently underway. Presidents, Business Officers, Enrollment Vice Presidents and Retention Officers should make sure that they are aware of the (*see Big Changes p.5*)

BIG CHANGES CONTINUED:

changes and have a seat at the table in the decision making process regarding how these opportunities will be implemented at their campuses.

Financial aid can be so complicated that chief administrators often leave decisions regarding financial aid solely in the hands of financial aid administrators. While their experience and knowledge is critically important, financial aid initiatives often impact colleges in unexpected ways. Every member of the institutional leadership team should participate in discussions when significant changes in aid administration or program growth occur.

There have been important changes in federal student aid in recent years:

- In 2006 the federal government introduced the Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG). This relatively new grant is for Federal Pell Grant Recipients in their first or second year of college who have completed rigorous high school programs. First year students can receive grants of \$750 while second year students can receive grants of \$1,300.
- The National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent Grants were introduced in the same year. They are also known as National SMART Grants. Federal Pell Grant recipients enrolled in their third and fourth years of study can be eligible for grants up to \$4,000 per year. These students must be majoring in physical, life, or computer sciences, mathematics, technology, engineering or in certain foreign languages.
- The Teacher Education Assistance for College or Higher Education Grant (TEACH Grant) has just been introduced for the coming year. Students who intend to teach at elementary or secondary schools serving students from low income families could be eligible for grants of up to \$4,000 per year. Such students do not need to demonstrate financial need in order to be eligible!
- The federal government has recently passed legislation that makes virtually all undergraduate students eligible for an additional \$2,000 of unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loans for the coming year. Eligibility is not based on financial need.
- Significant changes have occurred in the Federal and

private student lending industry. Many lenders have ceased participation and others have ceased working with certain colleges and universities. Still others have increased minimum credit eligibility requirements.

- The federal minimum wage will increase in July 2008 to \$6.55 and again in July 2009 to \$7.25. Increased wages will mean fewer work-study hours for students.
- Consider setting up a meeting with your Director of Financial Aid. Ensure that representatives from all of the key offices are in attendance.
- Take the opportunity to have your Financial Aid Director explain the changes in greater detail.
- Discuss the implications of these changes on financial aid packaging, student debt load, collections, retention, cash flow and the institutional discount rate.
- Find out how the aid office is handling the implementation of the changes. Is the implementation schedule supporting institutional goals?

These are important initiatives and changes. Divisional leaders will be well served by taking the time to understand them. Colleges and universities are going to be affected in many ways. It is prudent for top leaders to understand these changes and participate in strategic implementation since the impact will be felt across most institutional divisions.

MAXIMIZE YOUR SEARCH RESPONSE BY COMBINING DIRECT MAIL AND THE INTERNET

Doug Spadaro, PhD.  
David Waggoner, M.A.  
Premier Communications

As you are painfully aware, the typical high school student hears from hundreds of colleges as the college search process unfolds. Therefore it has become harder and harder to make your institution stand out from the crowd. Search response rates – which average between one and two percent – reflect this. We believe that there is a way to overcome this dismal response rate by combining the guaranteed delivery of direct (*see Maximize Search Response p.6*)