

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## MARS HILL COLLEGE SETS NEW STUDENT ENROLLMENT REC- ORDS

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group, Inc.

Dr. Dan Lunsford assumed the presidency of Mars Hill College in North Carolina in 2002. So much has changed under his leadership during the last nine years.

Dr. Lunsford initiated and completed the most successful capital campaign in history raising more than \$38 million against an aggressive goal of \$35 million.



*Dr. Dan Lunsford*

He implemented a plan to make improvements and additions to the physical plant:

- The Ferguson Math and Science building was designed and erected.
- The Wall academic center was completely renovated.

- The Lion's Eye courtyard was refurbished.
- Both Brown and Turner residence halls were completely renovated.
- A new living facility, Bailey Mountain residence hall, was built.
- The Nash education building was completely renovated.
- The Ammons Family Stadium Complex was redone to include a new turf field and press box.
- Enhancements were completed to provide wireless access across campus.

The growth of the physical plant continues as planning has already begun, including renderings, for a brand new classroom building that will also house administrative offices and a new bookstore

The College expanded athletic offerings:

- Men's and women's swim teams were started.
- Men's and women's cycling teams were introduced. The men's team even captured the national championship in 2011 in its third year of existence!

This year also marks the introduction of the first graduate degree program as the College now offers a Master's Degree in Education.

After making dramatic improvements to the campus and expanding academic and co-curricular offerings at Mars Hill College, Dr. Lunsford sought to grow the enrollment. Located in the mountains of Western North Carolina, the beautiful campus had plenty of room for enrollment growth so Dr. Lunsford partnered with The Dysart

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ON 100% RECYCLED PAPER.

## MARS HILL COLLEGE SETS NEW STUDENT ENROLLMENT RECORDS CONTINUED:

Group, Inc. to change the characterization of the College from the “the best kept secret in North Carolina.”

Working with the professionals in the admission and financial aid offices, some major changes were made to increase the awareness of the College throughout the state and region. A new marketing strategy was adopted with an emphasis on the success of MHC graduates. Institutional scholarship and grant programs were re-vamped to better recognize academic talent and meet financial need. The admission counselors utilized aggressive outreach to prospective students to educate them about the benefits of Mars Hill College. Messages were sent via telephone, email, direct mail, Facebook and text. As students found out more about MHC, they responded!

- The College secured the largest number of applications for admission in history.
- More students were accepted for admission than ever before.
- MHC increased new student enrollments by 34% over last year and enrolled the highest number of new students in 30 years!
- The total enrollment is the largest in two decades with the greatest number of residential students in 30 years.

It has been an exciting and productive nine years for the President. Dr. Lunsford, however, is not done yet. He plans to continue enrollment growth and product enhancements over the next few years.

## ENROLLMENT OUTCOMES AND PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESS

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group, Inc.

College and university presidents are rightfully focused on fundraising, endowments, curricular growth and public

relations. For small, private colleges and universities, these priorities can often come at the expense of the most important issue for presidents at tuition-driven schools—enrollment.

I am always surprised at how often enrollment, recruitment and financial aid take a backseat to other priorities. Perhaps it is because presidents usually do not bring significant enrollment management experience to the table. Perhaps presidents place too much faith in their enrollment management professionals, despite disappointing outcomes. Presidents may too often be swayed by convenient excuses for poor performance such as *demographic declines* and *bad economic conditions*. I believe that presidents devalue the importance of enrollment growth at significant career risk.

I am writing on this topic not only because I have a direct interest in the business of enrollment management, but also because I have witnessed the reality of several respected, committed, qualified and dedicated college presidents losing their jobs directly because of enrollment stagnation or decline.

I offer the following advice:

- Make enrollment the top priority of your presidency.
- Do not accept traditional excuses for failure to meet enrollment objectives vital to the financial health of the school.
- Speak with other presidents about your enrollment challenges, especially those who have been successful.
- Be willing to invest in your admission and financial aid offices regardless of the overall financial constraints at your college or university.
- Do not hesitate to seek guidance from qualified consultants with track records of success.

Ultimately a successful college presidency includes much more than enrollment. The most successful presidents I know, however, have utilized enrollment growth and increased revenue to achieve other goals regarding increased salaries for faculty and staff, enhanced student activities, the addition of new sports, new buildings, the growth of the physical plant and overall good news to drive alumni participation and fundraising.

## FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS: VISION, EMOTION AND CONNECTIVITY

Dr. Marylouise Fennell  
Partner  
Hyatt Fennell, Higher Education Services

Dr. Scott Miller  
President  
Bethany College

When it comes to student retention, it turns out that what we thought we knew *ain't necessarily so*. Current research reveals that many key assumptions on which we have often based enrollment management practices need to be challenged and modified.

Take, for instance, the traditional institutionally-centered focus on retention. When we as college CEOs and senior enrollment (admissions) managers turn this issue around, examining persistence from the student's standpoint, we enhance existing perspectives about what fosters students success, says Dr. Joe Pace, a nationally-known specialist in student retention.

Institutions have often acted on the knowledge that students are most vulnerable to dropping out within their first 90 days of enrollment by creating success-centered classes, First Year seminars and the like. Such courses are helpful in stemming attrition, but they don't go far enough. When we delve further into what motivates students to persist until graduation, we find that "it is total employee commitment and involvement that makes the difference," Pace notes.

Further, we have often placed most responsibility for retention upon faculty or enrollment management staff, rather than fostering connectivity across the board. All employees need to be models, mentors and monitors. The stronger the connections they foster with students, the higher the rate of student persistence.

The reverse is also true. "Unconscious saboteurs" — those who (often unknowingly) create negative enrollment outcomes -- can undo the best work of even model mentors. "It takes 11 positive mentor models to counteract the influence of one negative," Pace notes.

Thus, it is critical for institutions to train *all* employees in what Pace calls "the edupreneurial spirit," focusing on

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the student or customer-oriented side of higher education.

Next, institutions too often create a disconnect between student expectations and reality, emphasizing rational choices rather than emotion in the choice to remain enrolled or to drop out. College presidents and senior leadership need to embrace the "heart" or "hot button" strategies based on current cognitive behavioral research to assist students in persisting. Students who persist tend to have a sensory-rich vision in their minds; we want them to feel, taste and touch the goal. We may want to motivate them with a picture of the student in cap and gown holding a degree taken when he or she is a freshman. For many, it will be some other motivator, including photos with their parents, spouses and children and with them in cap and gown. Sometimes, the more humorous or audacious the imagery, the more effective. When students don't persist, it is often because their vision isn't concrete enough to take them through the rough spots.

Both i.q. and emotional intelligence are instrumental in boosting retention rates. Every employee of the college must

## FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS CONTINUED:

know what has been promised by the college to its students, and everyone must work to deliver what has been promised; dreams can quickly unravel. The more employees understand about the student's "picture," the more they can support it. Research shows that emotion is involved in any type of long-term change; people do not change without it. Thus, successful retention strategies touch both the head *and the heart*.

Next, while we sometimes view successful enrollment management strategies as relying on big, bold measures, we should remember that even small changes in institutional behavior can produce measurable results over time.

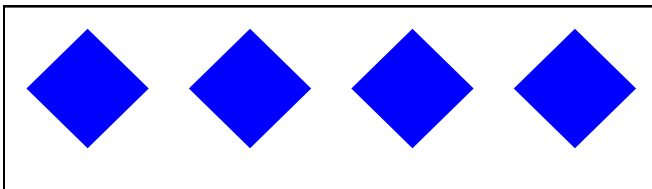
You retain one student at a time, one here, another there, and before you know it, over the course of a year, your retention will have improved by 10 percent.

Finally, we must recognize that improving retention is a task that is never going to be completed. It is ongoing. People ask, "When will this retention thing be solved?" It will never be totally solved.

However, by paying scrupulous attention to students' needs and expectations (attention equals retention), hiring and promoting instructors with "intelligent hearts," training "edupreneurs" and "touching the heart button," we can foster greater persistence, resulting in measurably higher retention.

*Dr. Scott D. Miller is President of the College and M.M. Cochran Professor of Leadership Studies at Bethany College in West Virginia. Now in his third college presidency, he has served as a CEO for nearly 21 years.*

*Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, a former president of Carlow University in Pittsburgh, PA, is senior counsel for the Council of Independent Colleges.*



## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT/ INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCE- MENT PARTNERSHIP

*Dr. Douglas E. Clark  
Vice President for Enrollment Management  
Ferrum College*

Higher education historian, Roger Geiger (2007) in his article, "After the Emergence: Voluntary Support and the Building of American Research Universities," described how in 1920 private research universities such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton embarked on a different evolutionary path from the public research universities. The private institutions discovered they could raise significant support from alumni donors and concluded that this support would enable them to slow enrollment growth in order to be more selective and thus more prestigious. That "prestige cycle" thus encouraged more donor support and helped to increase admissions selectivity even further. The public research institutions, on the other hand, needed program and enrollment growth in order generate more revenue. While that path to more revenue did not prevent public research universities from eventually becoming more selective and prestigious, it can be argued that they have not acquired the truly elite status of the Ivy League institutions and do not have a history of attracting the same level of donor support. Geiger's history lesson demonstrates the importance of institutional advancement and enrollment management working together to help promote the fortunes of private colleges. Needless to say, most colleges will not achieve the same level of prestige that has come to the Ivy League institutions noted above, but the same admissions/development dynamic that helped propel their fortunes can work for other institutions.

This article, therefore, will address how institutional advancement and enrollment management can work together to promote the image of their institution and help reposition it in the higher education environment. In addition to advancing the fortunes of the college in general, the two offices can reinforce each other's efforts to be successful in meeting their particular fundraising and admissions goals. Since both offices have an external focus, there is a natural fit for a collaborative effort. Peter Drucker (1966) argued in his classic work, *The Effective Executive*, that it is in the

## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT/ INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT PARTNERSHIP CONTINUED:

external environment where management can make the most impact on behalf of an organization. Drucker's dictum certainly applies to colleges. For private colleges with relatively small endowments, most revenue comes from external efforts in admissions and advancement. A strategy involving both offices will move a college or university to the next level in terms of prestige and improve both recruitment and development results. There are examples of coordination between the two offices, which have proven successful in moving an institution forward.

One important area of collaboration is building major gift potential. In fact, admissions can help recruit the next generation of major gift prospects by being a source of information for advancement – in effect, a form of donor research. For instance, admissions can pass on to the advancement office the names of entering students who are from private schools. Since those students are from families who are already paying private school tuition, they might be of interest to the advancement office as people with long term development potential. Their parents might also be good prospects for the parents' organization, which is a good initial step for involvement in the college. Also, the research staff in advancement can determine if there might be some other connection to the institution such as a relative who attended the college in the past. It is important to train admissions representatives to be alert to important details about the families with which they are working and pass on information that might be of interest to advancement.

The private school connection is not only beneficial for advancement, it is also good for enrollment management. As mentioned earlier, families at private schools are already used to paying tuition. Enrollment management is interested in these students because they have low need for financial aid which helps keep financial aid costs in check. For instance, suppose an institution has a growing number of alumni in the Baltimore area and decides to establish a chapter there. To build on the growing alumni presence, the institution might also decide to increase admissions recruitment in that area. To be truly successful in Baltimore, however, a college needs to have a viable lacrosse program since that city is one of the strongest centers of lacrosse in the country. Lacrosse is particularly important

for attracting students from the area's private schools. Even many Baltimore area students who do not play lacrosse still look for colleges that offer the sport since that is a signal to them that the college is a good fit. Also, lacrosse parents are fanatical and will help support the program which could lead to support in other areas. Both institutional advancement and enrollment management have an interest in getting lacrosse established and can use the argument that the institution could attract more "full pay" students from private schools who also have gift potential. It would also generate a stream of future alumni to build on the growing number already in Baltimore and further enhance the visibility of the institution. Once a college is identified as a "lacrosse school," doors will open at private schools.

Public relations, part of the advancement office at many institutions, can also play a role in building visibility. For instance, one simple thing the public relations office can do is send press releases to small local newspapers. Despite the decline in the newspaper industry, small neighborhood newspapers are both free and popular. Those newspapers are eager for news about local students who have academic and sports achievements. That visibility helps build the image of the institution with both alumni and potential students.

In a related strategy, enrollment management and public relations have worked together to cultivate the press to garner favorable publicity in appropriate media markets. At my institution, Ferrum College, we were interested in building our visibility among the business and community leaders in the nearby city of Roanoke, VA. A few years ago, when we realized our new student enrollment was going to surge and break new records at Ferrum, the two offices worked together to cultivate the Roanoke media. We pitched the story line that Ferrum College was in for a major turnaround under the leadership of its first women president. We started that effort in midsummer by laying the groundwork with a reporter who was interested in the story. The reporter met with the president who toured her around campus highlighting the many campus improvements including several new buildings. Enrollment management provided the reporter with admissions data, which demonstrated a growing interest in the school. That effort led to a summer story in the paper about "something happening at Ferrum" and then a major front page story in the fall when students arrived on campus. The local television stations were also out in force when the new students arrived to move into the residence halls. Those reports set off a wave of stories about Ferrum that have continued for almost three years, creating more visibility for the college and more demand for our president to appear at various forums.



## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT/ INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT PARTNERSHIP CONTINUED:

We have reprinted the favorable newspaper stories to distribute to prospective students (a reprint from a newspaper can be a powerful tool with prospective students since it has third party credibility). By working with public relations, we have used Ferrum's admissions success to create a "buzz" which then helped lead to even more enrollment success. That "buzz" has also generated more interest among the "movers and shakers" in the Roanoke community who now see Ferrum College as a "winner" and are more interested in being a part of our efforts.

In conclusion, institutional advancement can help build momentum in admissions which in turn creates more donor interest in the college. As the advancement office is more successful in attracting donor interest in the college, it helps the college improve its facilities and programs. That success then helps the college become more marketable and attract stronger and more affluent students, which builds a base for additional advancement support in the future and reinforces the success of the admissions/advancement partnership.

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## ADVANTAGES OF USING AN EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRM

Dr. Marylouise Fennell  
Cheryl Hyatt  
Hyatt-Fennell, Higher Education Services

"A search is hard work requiring daily attention. We bring best professional practice to this critical process," says Marylouise Fennell, partner in Hyatt-Fennell: Educational Services and Charitable Resources Group.

Hiring a search firm will not only be cost-effective, saving the institution both time and money, but outside assistance can enlarge the candidate pool, identify those who might not otherwise apply, and produce a sound, long-lasting fit between candidate and employer.

Every search is different. The 'bullpen' approach used by some 'headhunters', in which candidates are recycled for different positions at several different institutions, simply doesn't meet the needs of either candidates or the institutions. We can find many candidates, but only a select few will fit the culture of a given institution.

All colleges and universities should use executive search firms for high-level positions. Here are some additional reasons why this investment is a prudent use of institutional resources:

***Executive search firms can shorten the process, thereby maintaining the interest of strong candidates.***

A good search takes about five months; it may require a bit less time, but it should not take longer. Initial screening and vetting of candidates can reduce the pool to be interviewed by the search committee to a select list of well-qualified finalists, while also ensuring that the salary and total package expectations are in line with what the institution can offer. By maintaining frequent contact with top candidates, experienced executive recruiters can also retain their interest. Executive search firms can also bring their expertise to the composition of search committees, further expediting the process. We've seen some committees with as many as 25 members, obviously an unwieldy number. We can narrow and refine this process.

***Executive search firms can best perform 'due diligence', checking off-resume references and thoroughly vetting both candidate and institutional history, preventing costly mistakes in hiring.***

Through extensive professional networks within the industry, executive recruiters can personally contact listed and non-listed references, ensuring confidentiality and facilitating the sharing of more personal information about candidates than would typically be obtained by in-house human resource departments. We can also prepare candidates with a more in-depth history about the hiring institution to ensure a strong fit.

***Executive search firms can both enhance the quality of the candidate pool and help the institution cull the field to a manageable list of finalists.***

The credibility of executive recruiters within their specialty and industry will identify excellent candidates who are not

## ADVANTAGES OF USING AN EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRM CONTINUED:

actively “looking,” but who are ready for the next career challenge. For high-level positions, they will produce applicants who would not necessarily apply to a human resources advertisement. In addition, the extensive resources and contacts of executive recruiters typically go far beyond the several job lists and websites used by in-house hiring offices to identify the best candidates for a particular opening.

When all these advantages of customized, personalized executive search are considered, bringing in a professional firm is money very well spent.

*Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, has spent more than 35 years in higher education administration and search and is among the best-known and highly respected consultants in the field of independent higher education. She served as past president of Carlow University in Pittsburgh and also serves as senior counsel to the Washington, DC-based Council of Independent Colleges. She has consulted widely throughout the world. Dr. Fennell currently sits on three College Boards and is the Chair of the Board of one of these institutions.*

*Cheryl Hyatt, with almost 20 years of executive search consulting experience, has been responsible for successfully recruiting senior administrative professionals for educational and non-profit organizations. She brings 30 years of management and organizational leadership experience to her role with clients. Cheryl's breadth of experience, knowledge and contacts make her sought after professionally in her field. Mrs. Hyatt also sits on various non-profit boards offering a variety of expertise to each organization.*

## ANOTHER MILESTONE AT FERRUM COLLEGE IN VIRGINIA

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group, Inc.

More good news continues to come out of Virginia. Ferrum College has been on an historic, record-setting enrollment growth trend since Dr. Jennifer Braaten took over the presidency.

So much has been accomplished during her short tenure including:

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- rapid growth
- academic program expansion
- additions to the physical plant
- new athletic offerings
- additional co-curricular opportunities
- green initiatives
- targeted retention efforts

Well, a new milestone has been reached at the formerly small college located in Southwest Virginia. The total enrollment at Ferrum College will **exceed 1,500 students** for the first time in decades!

Despite the intense competition for students, the attractiveness of public institutions in the Commonwealth and bleak economic conditions, Ferrum also realized another increase in the number of new students this year.

While most other private colleges and universities are dealing with enrollment stagnation, Ferrum continues to thrive and grow.

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