

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY OF ALEXANDRIA GROWS IN A DIFFICULT CLIMATE FOR PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

John W. Dysart
President
The Dysart Group

The enrollment management landscape is rapidly changing for public colleges and universities. For decades, these institutions have been under somewhat less pressure to produce net revenue and shape their classes. The combination of generous state subsidies and extremely competitive pricing models in comparison with their private school counterparts mitigated the impact of changing demographics and stagnating federal and state financial aid. It's a different ballgame and public colleges and universities must recognize new challenges. Note between 2008 and 2013:

- States reduced public college and university subsidies per student by an average of 28%
- Eleven states cut their subsidies by more than one-third
- Two states cut subsidies in half
- One state increased tuition by 65%
- One state increased tuition by 111%

Louisiana State University of Alexandria had been struggling with enrollment. The institution had experienced a decade of steady decline. The appointment of a new Chancellor has reversed the trend. The new Chancellor jokingly summed up part of the challenge, "Originally, our university was state-funded, and then it was state-supported, and then it was state-assisted. (Now) it's moving to become state-located." Dr. Daniel Howard came to LSUA from Arkansas State University. His extensive experience at a number of schools in a broad range of administrative positions, including a stint as Dean of Enrollment Management, prepared him for the challenge. A two-pronged strategy that included dramatic programming initiatives and the implementation of a new recruitment plan produced an enrollment turnaround.



Dr. Daniel Howard, Chancellor, LSUA

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

PAGE 1

Louisiana State University of Alexandria Grows in a Difficult Climate for Public Colleges and Universities

PAGE 3

Cool Comes at a Cost: Student Spending Drives Spending Shifts

PAGE 4

Preparing for a New Financial Aid Season

PAGE 5

Setting New Priorities for Institutions Serving Significant Numbers of At-Risk Students

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PRINTED ON 100% RE-
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LSUA GROWS CONTINUED:

LSUA partnered with The Dysart Group to implement a new recruitment plan. Dr. Howard vowed to apply a “private school” recruitment model to the struggling public university and significant changes were immediately introduced:

- New tracking reports were designed and generated to monitor progress throughout the enrollment funnel.
- A telephone outreach center was established to communicate individually with qualified, prospective students.
- The LSUA Foundation helped fund the creation of a new scholarship and grant program designed to recognize academic talent and meet financial need.
- Systematic communication with prospective students included electronic mechanisms such as text messaging and email along with traditional direct mail.
- Major changes were made with regard to financial aid policy and process. The new emphasis was on making LSUA affordable and notifying students of their financial aid eligibility as early in the cycle as possible.

The Chancellor directed changes in current programming and was instrumental to the introduction of new opportunities for students.

- A greater emphasis has been placed on dual enrollment for high school students. The new emphasis effectively serves the students and families at local high schools but also provides high school students the chance to experience the quality educational product at LSUA.
- New athletic programs have been started to attract both student athletes and students wishing to participate as fans.
- New academic programs are being offered.
- ROTC will be an option for students beginning next year.
- LSUA now offers a competitive Honors Program to

attract highly qualified students.

The combination of the new recruitment model and program changes immediately produced results. This Fall, the University posted impressive enrollment outcomes.

- Total enrollment at the University increased by 21%
- The number of newly enrolled transfer students grew by 28%
- Students participating in dual enrollment soared 121%
- The number of newly enrolled freshmen increased by 16%
- The University registered an increase in total credits of 22%
- Fall 2014 represents the largest enrollment in more than 15 years
- Despite an increase in residence hall capacity of 25%, every bed is full

Success at LSUA required the active participation of the entire campus community. Student Services, Enrollment Management, Financial Aid, Academics and Development all contributed to the exciting results. Enrollment realities have been altered significantly for many public colleges and universities. The experience of the team at LSUA provides a meaningful and effective model for other public institutions beset by subsidy cuts, tuition increases, demographic changes and competition.



COOL COMES AT A COST: STUDENT SPENDING DRIVES SPENDING SHIFTS

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
Principal
Hyatt Fennell

Dr. Scott D. Miller
President
Bethany College

Competition among peer institutions is the most intense we have seen in over 30 years, with the demand for student-centered programs, services and facilities forcing significant shifts in institutional spending. But such “cool” offerings come at substantial cost.

It’s no secret that today’s Millennial generation expects amenities beyond what their grandparents and parents could have imagined in their wildest dreams. Food courts, shopping malls, fitness centers, state-of-the-art athletic facilities, high-end residences and well-equipped recreation attractions are not only expected, but essential to driving enrollment and retention. A student’s 168-hour week consists of 18 hours in the classroom and 50 sleeping; for the remaining 100 hours, it’s up to us to partner with them to provide the entire educational experience. Increasingly, many colleges and universities are spending more to guarantee the attractiveness of that experience.

Even with significant investments in these areas, many institutions are seeing declining six-year graduation rates, especially on small and rural campuses. Strained finances, pressures of juggling academics, employment and extracurricular activities and a preference for urban attractions all contribute to attrition.

All this suggests that to stay in the game, *campuses must be increasingly student-centered, and that means shifting spending priorities.* Many institutions have doubled or even tripled student life spending to keep pace. Recent research suggests that student-services spending “has grown 20 to 30 percent at many colleges, outpacing any other category,” as reported by Scott Carlson in a July 28, 2014, *Chronicle of Higher Education* article. He adds that “even if the amenities, activities, and support cost many thousands of dollars per student, especially at elite institu-

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tions, they represent a college cost that students and their parents have asked for—either explicitly or through their decisions in enrollment.”

Family expectations of the college experience have also upped the ante; we’re all familiar with the so-called “helicopter” parents and even what some have called the “snowplow” families who continue to be involved in their students’ lives even after they have matriculated. Common complaints directed to campus administrators include lack of athletic playing time, students’ grades and a perennial favorite, dining hall food. New research by the Delta Project of the American Institutes for Research and others reveals some trends in institutional spending during the period 2001-2011:

- *Four-year institutions’ investment in non-instructional student services continued strong while “efforts to preserve instructional spending were mixed.”* Private institutions were especially inclined to spend more on student services.

COOL COMES AT A COST CONTINUED:

- **Student support services and facilities are also part of the mix.** More first-generation, learning-disabled, special-needs and non-traditional students often require increased counseling and other student services to enable them to succeed. Colleges today are serving new populations that either would not have matriculated in earlier generations, or would have been under-served.
- **Compliance with regulations is another factor in institutional spending.** Bethany College recently tallied the number of mandatory report deadlines from accrediting and regulatory bodies (and the like), and found that the number is over 200 annually. For small institutions with typically thin staffing, compliance, though a necessary and integral part of the academic mission, is often challenging.

Although “cool” is undeniably costly, institutional investment in student-centered areas is increasingly essential for colleges to remain competitive in a volatile and aggressive enrollment marketplace. The challenge, simultaneously, will lie in making needed investments on the instructional side, to meet students’ career expectations.

Dr. Scott D. Miller is President and M.M. Cochran Professor of Leadership Studies at Bethany College. He was previously President of Wesley College and Lincoln Memorial University. He is Chair of the Board of Directors of Academic Search, Inc.

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

They have collaborated on 11 books, including “President to President: Views on Technology in Higher Education” (Volumes I to III) and “Presidential Perspectives” (Volumes I to VIII). They edit the popular higher education thought series “Presidential Perspectives” (Aramark Higher Education), now in its ninth year (www.presidentialperspectives.org).



PREPARING FOR A NEW FINANCIAL AID SEASON

John W. Dysart
President
The Dysart Group

It is that time of year again. Students and families are in the midst of the college selection process. Up until now, choosing a college has been an abstract exercise. Now that the choices have narrowed, affordability comes into play.

There is no question about the importance of price and financial aid. While we may hope that the final decision will be made based upon academic offerings, the quality of faculty and the opportunities for co-curricular activities, net price certainly influences the decision and sometimes is the determining factor.

The role of financial aid in enrollment is critically important for all types of colleges and universities. So what can enrollment leaders do to ensure that their financial aid operations support recruitment and retention this cycle?

Aggressively Encourage Students to Apply for Financial Aid

Students and families must be actively encouraged to apply for financial aid. This is true for both new and returning students. Consider periodic postcard mailings to students and families. Supplement paper reminders with electronic messages. Place telephone calls to students who do not respond to paper or electronic reminders.

Begin Packaging in January

Colleges and universities are well served by addressing cost concerns as early as possible. The sooner students can be notified of their financial aid eligibility, the better. Early packaging means families have time for financial planning such as arranging payment plans, researching other borrowing opportunities and even securing part-time employment.

Ensure a 48-Hour Turnaround

Once students apply for financial aid, ensure that packages are sent immediately. Institutions often allow weeks to lapse between the time a financial aid application is re-

PREPARING FOR A NEW FINANCIAL AID SEASON CONTINUED:

ceived and the time an actual award letter is sent. Understand that if your school has received the aid application, so have your competitors. Get the students packaged within 48 hours of receipt of the application.

Monitor Folder Completion Rates

Packaging in a timely manner is obviously important, but additional paperwork is often required to complete the financial aid process. Financial aid administrators should monitor the receipt of other required paperwork to ensure that the aid offer is ready for disbursement by the time school starts. Students who do not turn in required paperwork may be signaling dissatisfaction with the package or may be considering transferring to another school or enrolling elsewhere. Active telephone follow-up with such students might create chances to listen to appeals or even to address other enrollment concerns.

Communicate with Admission Staff and Other Campus Administrators

Take steps to ensure open communication lines with representatives in the Admission Office and other campus constituent groups. Admission counselors will likely be speaking to admission applicants and can provide feedback on how well the financial aid award letters are received by prospective students. Other campus groups, including faculty, housing staff and coaches should contact aid administrators if they are aware of financial problems being experienced by currently enrolled students.

The role of financial aid in recruitment and retention has never been more important for both private and public colleges and universities. Make sure that your institution is ready to address concerns this cycle.

SETTING NEW PRIORITIES



FOR INSTITUTIONS SERVING SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

John W. Dysart
President
The Dysart Group

The higher education landscape is changing quickly. Demographic realities are impacting public, private and for-profit institutions. We are seeing, at many colleges and universities, increasing numbers of minority students, first-generation college students and high need students. Such trends are likely to continue for years to come.

The good news is that there are literally hundreds of institutions willing to recruit and enroll students of color, students with high financial need, students with low standardized test scores, students with lower than average high school grade point averages and students coming from families with little or no history of post-secondary experience. The bad news is that retention and graduation outcomes at many of these colleges and universities are poor. Institutions that enroll large numbers of at-risk students must recognize that their education and co-curricular offerings must be radically different than the normal model. The fact is that schools serving this population must conduct their educational business in a manner tailored to the students they enroll.

Financial Aid

The institutional approach to financial aid makes a difference. Unless the college or university has a large endowment, it is unlikely that schools serving at-risk populations are going to have low discount rates.

- Too great an emphasis on an arbitrary discount rate goal can result in increased attrition and outstanding receivables.
- Serving high need students may mandate a greater commitment to need-based aid, a higher discount rate and a more detailed and targeted packaging strategy.
- More effort must be put into effectively encouraging new and returning students to apply for financial aid which allows more time for financial aid planning.

SETTING NEW PRIORITIES FOR INSTITUTIONS SERVING SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS CONTINUED:

Technology

Technology is available to better track student success. The ability to monitor student progress can allow for proactive intervention.

- Academic support personnel can intervene if students are not attending class.
- Representatives from Student Services can contact students to actively encourage participation in co-curricular activities.
- Contact and communication by all campus constituent groups with students can be recorded.
- Students struggling with payment plans can be contacted as soon as the first payment is missed rather than waiting until the end of the term when the accumulated balance may be too large to resolve.

Proactive Intervention

Having the ability to track students is meaningless without personnel available to intervene when necessary. Proactive intervention is perhaps the most powerful tool for student success at institutions serving at-risk populations.

- Colleges and universities will need to invest in personnel to intervene with students.
- Continuing to rely on faculty or already over-worked staff in the academic support department is unlikely to work.
- While finding the resources to hire a group of professional advisors or a team of mentors is difficult, it may be impossible to serve at-risk populations well without such an investment.

Better Informed Academic Advising

- Academic advisors must be able to work with students to keep them on track to graduate in four years whenever possible. Students who take five or six years to graduate are pretty much guaranteed to enter the workforce with higher debt loads and lost opportunity income.
- These days academic advisors must be knowledgeable about financial aid. Federal rules on satisfactory academic progress must be understood by advisors. Uninformed scheduling can result in students running out of financial aid before they graduate.

Pricing

Doing everything to keep costs as low as possible is obvious.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the institutional budget to see if there are opportunities for savings. Its easy to get trapped in a budgeting rut as we continue to invest in services or initiatives because we have always done so.
- Is it time to reconsider how we invest in libraries given technological realities?
- Are we taking full advantage of classroom resources by ensuring that courses are offered at least five days a week, all day long?
- Are student/faculty ratios appropriate?
- When was the last time an institution-wide review was conducted regarding required textbooks? Is the cost of each textbook really being considered annually? Is it possible to reduce the costs by using more resources available electronically?

The number of institutions serving at-risk students is growing and demographics indicate that the trend will continue. It is terrific that there are colleges and universities willing to attract and educate disadvantaged students. It is likely, however, that such schools will need to change their business and education models in order to serve these students well.

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with John Dysart,
President of
THE DYSART GROUP
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