

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT LEADERS

John W. Dysart  
President  
THE DYSART GROUP

College and university Presidents are likely to be charged with securing new leadership in the enrollment management division at least once during their tenures. What exactly should Presidents be looking for in Chief Enrollment Officers or Vice Presidents for Enrollment Management? What are the right questions to ask? How should experience be evaluated? These are important questions to answer to hire effective leaders supervising recruitment and financial aid operations.

### Appropriate Experience

Obviously, a candidate with experience in admissions is preferable. If your chief enrollment officer is also charged with retention responsibilities then a track record in this area is also valuable. One skill set, often over-looked, is an understanding of financial aid. While your enrollment leader need not have a direct background as a financial aid officer, a basic understanding of financial aid, discount rates and the creation and tracking of institutional aid programs is helpful. Even significant experience in admissions and retention is dubious without a workable knowledge of financial aid.

### Outcomes

Having worked in an Admission Office or Financial Aid Office or even having served as chief enrollment officer at another college or university or multiple institutions is insufficient. Presidents should also make a point of reviewing the outcomes at previous schools. Were the candidates able to grow the application pool? What percentage of admission applicants completed the admission process? Was the yield near or above national norms? Did enrollment remain steady? If your institution requires growth in enrollment, do the candidates have a record of increasing enrollment?

This information is available by reviewing the trends at the candidate's previous institution(s) on IPEDS. I am surprised by the number of Presidents and search committees never bothering to check the outcomes for candidates on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>). You can also evaluate financial aid outcomes on this site.

If your open leadership position includes retention, IPEDS is another great source. On this site you can see retention trends and graduation rates. If your institution requires material increases in retention, see if your candidates have a track record of acceptable retention and graduation rates.

### Mission Fit

Experience and a track record of success are paramount. You must, however, keep your institutional mission in mind when selecting the right candidate. It is

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## IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE ENROLLMENT LEADERS CONTINUED:

generally better to choose leaders who have demonstrated a commitment to your mission. A candidate from an elite college or university may not be the best fit at a college with essentially open admission standards. Candidates from schools that are not ethnically diverse may not be the right choice at a school where most enrollees are students of color.

Recruitment strategies, financial aid policies and retention tactics should be designed with specific student characteristics in mind. Retention approaches that have been effective at a tier-one public university may not translate at an open-door community college for example. Recruitment publications designed to appeal to third and fourth generation college students may not work at a college where most students come from families with little or no higher education experience.

This does not mean that candidates must have worked at a similar institution to be effective. It does, however, help.

### Data-Driven Decision Making

The very best enrollment managers are focused on data. Data-driven decision making is critical. During the interview process, ask candidates to describe the content of their weekly admission, financial aid and retention reports. Which numbers and what trends do they evaluate weekly? Ask the candidates to provide two or three example of how data informed a new policy, strategy or tactic.

### Personality

You will want to select an enrollment leader with whom you can work. The individual will need to have the kind of personality that will work well with not only the President, but the other cabinet members. You should ensure that the candidates meet with each member of the cabinet or leadership team.

Your chief enrollment officer is likely to have the greatest impact on recruitment, retention, your discount rate and net tuition revenue. It is important to be prepared for the interview process and conduct some research in advance.

## THE CONTEMPORARY ENROLLMENT MODEL FOR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

Dr. Marylouise Fennell  
Principal  
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President  
Virginia Wesleyan University

For several decades, we've written extensively about business models for liberal arts colleges. A private college with an endowment of under \$100 million should have a full-time enrollment of at least 1,100. This number provides "critical mass" for campus climate, student life, and budgetary operations without compromising the small college atmosphere.

In recent years, we've gone a step further – in addition to a core enrollment of at least 1,100 students, other programs should be added: graduate, special session, early enrollment, and online. With national financial rating organizations predicting doom and gloom for many institutions, this model is imperative to the long-term strength and solvency of many institutions.

Enrollment management remains the single most vital area of any college or university with a tuition-driven budget. Of the more than 1,500 private colleges in the United States, approximately 30 percent have enrollments under 1,000. As institutions revise their marketing strategies, develop retention programs, and upgrade campus facilities, parents and students remain in the consumer driver's seat.

A winning enrollment strategy starts at the top with a president fully committed to the comprehensive enrollment model and process. In these times, it's too easy for enrollment issues to be placed on the back burner as fundraising consumes presidential time and energy. It is essential that the president remain hands-on in both areas.

The president must take the lead in setting financial aid priorities. We hear many stories of presidents getting into trouble over runaway financial-aid budgets. "Buying" students with steep discounts is a recipe for financial ruin. Contrary to popular opinion, it is possible to attract and

## THE CONTEMPORARY ENROLLMENT MODEL CONTINUED:

retain students, while also improving selectivity, access, and affordability. It's all in the planning.

Scott's transformational story as President of Wesley College in Delaware was extensively profiled in "Small College Guide: Weathering Turbulent Times" (Michael K. Townsley/NACUBO) and "The Entrepreneurial College President" (James L. Fisher & James V. Koch/ACE).

His story – and several others – chronicle effective models that support our key recommendations:

### Full-time Traditional Enrollment

This is the budget driver of any small liberal arts college. Our colleague Jeffrey Docking, President of Adrian College in Michigan, has authored a particularly useful book entitled "Crisis in Higher Education: A Plan to Save Small Liberal Arts Colleges in America" that outlines an effective model of growing full-time enrollment. He recommends leveraging intercollegiate athletics and co-curricular events. Written to facilitate replication and generalization of Adrian College's tremendous enrollment growth and retention success since 2005, his book directly addresses the economic competitiveness of small four-year institutions of higher education, and presents an evidence-based solution to the enrollment and economic crises faced by many small liberal arts colleges throughout the country.

Our colleague John Dysart, President of The Dysart Group of Charlotte, North Carolina takes it a step further. Develop the comprehensive model, he says, but utilize a data-based process: Data-Based Decision-Making in Recruitment, Data-Based Decision-Making in Financial Aid Award Policies, Data-Based Decision-Making for Retention.

### Graduate Programs

With rapid growth in size, stature, and delivery systems, undergraduate degrees are now the minimal expectation for educational attainment. Many institutions have accelerated their marketing of the next level of degree completion—master's programs, which are often packaged as an extension of the four-year degree.

### January Term, May Term, Summer Session

Special sessions are important to the comprehensive model. They improve retention and cohort graduation rates while generating needed revenues. Special sessions also enrich the curricular offerings with unusual or special-topic courses.

### Early Enrollment Programs

Dual-credit programs and Advanced Scholars Programs for motivated high school students are popular. It's not unusual now to have students apply to enroll in college with 30 to 60 hours of college credit. For private campuses, these programs can also provide important contact with high school instructors who influence students' college choices.

### Online Programs

Small private colleges should develop hybrid classes and online programs. Liberal arts colleges, for the most part, aren't trying to be the University of Phoenix, but current students would benefit from developing technology

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## THE CONTEMPORARY ENROLLMENT MODEL CONTINUED:

proficiency in this area. Cohort graduation rates increase with these offerings in non-peak periods, and adult learners benefit significantly, too.

In conclusion, summer months are a critical period for colleges as they set plans and goals for the coming year. Many small colleges have not met their enrollment goals in recent years. By following our suggested guidelines, your campus can minimize its chances of being among them.

# # #

*Dr. Scott D. Miller is President of Virginia Wesleyan University, Virginia Beach, VA. Previously, he was President of Bethany College, 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 14 books, including "President to President: Views on Technology in Higher Education" (Volumes I to III) and "Presidential Perspectives" (Volumes I to X) They edit the popular higher education thought series "President to President" ([www.president2president.com](http://www.president2president.com) -- Sodexo).*

## HIRING QUALIFIED ADMISSION COUNSELORS

John W. Dysart  
President  
THE DYSART GROUP

Admission counselors are an integral part of the recruitment process and will likely have the greatest influence on whether prospective students attend your institution. Admission counselors are on the front line and their ability to build relationships, provide information and deal with objections is critical.

### Passion for the Institution/Mission

It is important to hire people able to demonstrate a real

passion for the institution. Belief in the mission and the ability to show enthusiasm for the college or university is a must. This explains why most admission counselors are graduates of the institution where they are employed. While status as an alum need not be a requirement for hire, it certainly helps.

Candidates from other institutions can be effective advocates. Look for applicants that attended institutions that are at least similar. A graduate from a technical institute may have a difficult time recruiting for a traditional liberal arts college.

### Flexible Work Schedule

At most schools, flexible work schedules are a given. Admission counselors are usually required to travel to attend college fairs and make high school visits. This can often involve overnight stays and work during the evenings. Even when not on the road, admission counselors must work some evenings to engage prospective students as the customer is generally not available for communication during the day due to high school attendance and extracurricular activities.

### Comfortable with Telephone Outreach

The telephone is still the most powerful tool in college admissions. You should seek to hire individuals who can successfully communicate by telephone. Look for applicants with telemarketing experience. For applicants who have graduated from college recently, find people who may have participated in telephone campaigns for alumni fundraising. Ensure that candidates understand that they will be spending a great deal of time on the telephone speaking with admission applicants.

### General Communication Skills

Telephone proficiency is important, but admission counselors must also be comfortable with face-to-face interaction. This talent is best evaluated during the interview. Did the candidate seem at ease during the interview? Did the candidate demonstrate an ability to think on his/her feet? Did the candidate make eye contact throughout the interview? Good admission counselors must be organized, be able to review folders and make informed decisions, but the most important attribute is the ability to communicate.

### Basic Knowledge of Texting and Social Media

## HIRING QUALIFIED ADMISSION COUNSELORS CONTINUED:

Seek candidates with at least basic knowledge of texting and social media. Written communication skills are important. While most of your candidates will have experience texting, texting by an admission counselor is different. Such texting is generally more formal and requires writing aptitude.

Ask the candidates about their proficiency in social media. Do they have a Facebook page? How do they use it? Are they familiar with Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest? During the interview, inquire how they might use each of these social media platforms to communicate with prospective students.

### Motivation to Succeed

While it is difficult to measure, you want to hire people who are motivated to succeed. This is where the resume might be helpful. Did the candidate perform well in college? Did the candidate participate in activities such as athletics or the fine arts? Did the candidate get promoted at previous job?

Hiring effective admission counselors can make the difference in recruitment success or failure. Take the time to initiate a hiring process most likely to yield excellent admission counselors.

## RETAINING QUALITY ADMISSION COUNSELORS

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group

Admission counselors are among the most important employees at any college or university. Their impact on the institution is broad and vital. When you have successfully recruited and hired excellent admission counselors, what can you do to keep them?

### Career Track

You are more likely to retain good admission counselors if you structure the office in a manner where counselors can

see a clear career track. Few want to remain admission counselor for the long term. Good people, however, might persist if they see opportunities for advancement and professional growth.

You may initially hire candidates as “admission counselors.” After a year of good performance these people could be promoted to the title of “Senior Admission Counselor,” a position that includes a raise and more responsibilities. Excellent performance in this position should result in a promotion to “Assistant Director of Admission,” a title that should include some supervisory responsibilities. Successful outcomes in this position could result in a promotion to “Associate Director of Admission.” You have now created a clear and useful process to groom the very best professional staff members for the role of “Director of Admission.”

The job can be made even more attractive if you provide continuous training to your people on financial aid and teach them the basics of packaging, aid types, folder completion and budgeting. Allow employees at the associate level to participate in financial aid activities. This can open the possibility of a new title like “Associate Director of Admission and Financial Aid.” This title can be useful for folks who eventually would like to secure the position of chief enrollment officer.

### Flexible Schedule

Admission counselors must work difficult hours because of travel and evening hours to make telephone calls to prospective students. Be creative when establishing the work schedule.

- Regardless of Human Resource Classification the work schedule should be established in a manner that ensures counselor do not work more than 40 hours per week. Working until nine in the evening one night might mean coming in at noon the next day.
- Consider the use of long weekends in the work schedule. A counselor working two nights per week might be given every other Friday off.
- Summer can be a great time to reward excellent performance with additional vacation time.

### Professional Development

## RETAINING QUALITY ADMISSION COUNSELORS CONTINUED:

Providing opportunities for professional development makes sense based on just the merits. But professional development investments are a requirement if you seek to retain good admission personnel.

- Allow the counselors to attend state National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) conferences every year.
- Encourage more senior professionals to attend the national NACAC conference.
- Consider attendance at other conferences such as NASFAA and AACRO. Academic Impressions offers professional development webinars and conferences useful for admission professionals.

### Compensation

Compensation makes a difference. The position should not be viewed as an interim job for recent college graduates but must be a professional position with a salary that reflects the importance of the position. Admission counselors generate a significant portion of total institutional revenue. Their work can influence net revenue, discount rates and even retention and graduation rates.

The national average salary for an admission counselor is approximately \$35,000 a year. Many counselors, however, earn much less.

One cannot expect dedicated performance, high quality communication, a demonstrated zest for the institution and thus recruitment success if individuals are not compensated appropriately.

Review your salary ranges and compare them to both national and regional averages to ensure you are competitive.

Retaining admission professionals should be a priority but institutional leaders should understand the good retention rates require investment.



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