

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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CHALLENGING HEADLINES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION MEAN "TIME TO ACT" FOR MANY INSTITUTIONS

John W. Dysart
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These are trying times for many colleges and universities. The spate of headlines regarding retrenchment and closings in recent years is alarming. Pressure is being felt by public institutions, religious-affiliated colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities and myriad private schools. Media headlines tell the story:

Bacone College in Oklahoma is Closing

Troubles at Piedmont Technical College

Mergers Recommended for Pennsylvania Public Colleges

Atlantic Union College to Close

Mount Ida College Closes

Enrollment at New Mexico's Public Colleges Drops 5%

Concordia College in Alabama to Close

Arkansas Baptist College Continues Financial Problems

St. Gregory's in Oklahoma Closes

Memphis College of Art Closes

Grace University in Nebraska Announces It Will Close

Saint Joseph's College in Indiana Suspends Operations

Wheelock College Plans Merger

Holy Cross College Faces Financial Crisis

Pillsbury Baptist College Closes

Golden Valley Lutheran College Closes

Alliance College Closes

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CHALLENGING HEADLINES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION CONTINUED:

Marian Court College Closes

Burlington College shuts down

Dowling College Closes

SAINT CATHARINE COLLEGE CLOSES

Marygrove College Shuts down Its Undergraduate Programs

College of St. Joseph in Vermont Considers Closing

Marylhurst U to Close Amid Shrinking Enrollment

University of Missouri-Columbia Plans to Close 12 Graduate Programs

The fact that many colleges are struggling to maintain enrollment is not particularly surprising given the challenging demographic trends. Prices are rising, federal financial aid remains stagnant, states are cutting subsidies and grant allocations and the economy is improving. The market conditions have certainly contributed to the spate of closings, program cuts, mergers and retrenchment.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that while some colleges and universities are faced with declining enrollments and revenues, others are actually thriving under the same market forces. If you find that your institution is among the schools at risk, it is time to take some bold steps to ensure survival.

The first step is to admit your institution faces challenges that are likely to impact the quality of your offerings and long-term viability. Too many administrators wait for market or demographic changes to solve their issues. Understand that it is unlikely that outside forces are going to improve your enrollment and revenue.

Take a hard look at your current recruitment operation and consider serious changes. Making minor adjustments along the margins is not going to be enough. Consider implementing new initiatives at each stage of the funnel:

- ✓ What is the plan to increase the number of viable inquiries? Are your current inquiry sources actually producing applications, acceptances and enrollments?
- ✓ Outline specific plans to increase the number of admission applicants.
- ✓ Examine your application completion rates. If fewer than 70% of your admission applicants complete their folders, you have communication problems and may not be holding your professional staff accountable.
- ✓ What else can you be doing to encourage accepted applicants to enroll?

Take a hard look at your financial aid process.

- ✓ Does your process ensure that 80% of returning students are packaged by the end of the Spring term?
- ✓ Did you successfully encourage the majority of your admission applicants to apply for financial aid?
- ✓ Have you dedicated sufficient institutional resources to financial aid?

Appoint an institutional task force to review all current recruitment and financial aid tactics and charge the team with producing a series of new initiatives to grow enrollment and increase net revenue. Work with the Board of Trustees to identify additional financial resources to fund new initiatives. Speak with colleagues at other colleges and universities to garner ideas. Consider bringing in a qualified consultant to assist with the implementation of a new plan.

There are no guarantees that revamping your recruitment and financial operations will be successful. But if your college or university is in trouble, it is worse to be among

CHALLENGING HEADLINES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION CONTINUED:

the institutions unwilling to consider bold action until it is too late.

PLANNING FOR GROWTH: MAKING THE MOST OF A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
Principal
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Dr. Scott D. Miller
President
Virginia Wesleyan University

Presidential transitions often precede campus transformation, ushering in new periods of growth and visibility for the institution. Effective presidents and their teams take full advantage of a new CEO's arrival, the "honeymoon" period of good will and excitement, and opportunities to prepare for success while evaluating current conditions.

Under a new president's leadership, sound planning can translate into major gains for enrollment, fundraising, and internal and external relations.

Having extensive experience in managing successful transitions, we recommend the following key steps:

- *Recognize that the transitional period offers unique opportunities for valuable independent perspective.* We highly recommend that the board chair authorize an objective institutional review, preferably prior to the president's arrival or within the first few months. The review should be conducted by an external team experienced in institutional governance, planning, and finance. In addition to establishing a working agenda for the new administration, the review will disclose potential pitfalls to avoid; evaluate perceptions of the institution by alumni, friends, and other key constituencies; assess the strengths

and weaknesses of internal organization; and provide recommendations for academic programs, faculty, staff, students, finance, and long-range planning.

- *Start the planning process with consulting partners who can offer expert guidance—and open the door for funding.* Arriving at his fourth presidency at Virginia Wesleyan, Scott engaged the campus-services company, Aramark, and campus master-planning consultants, Derck & Edson, to conduct a comprehensive plan for facilities assessment, enhancement, and future growth. The yearlong process, which benefited from extensive evaluation of facilities and interviews with faculty, staff, and students, ranked improvement projects by priority, offered creative ideas for campus aesthetics, and addressed programmatic needs and growth potential for academics, student life, and athletics. Shared selectively with top donors of Virginia Wesleyan, the plan inspired their interest in funding new construction, including needed entrances and roadways and renovation or

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PLANNING FOR GROWTH: MAKING THE MOST OF A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD CONTINUED:

expansion of existing academic and athletic facilities.

- *Work with your donors on a vision for future success—and tell your story often.* As projects are funded through private giving, share updates with the funders while giving them the “insider’s” view of how the campus master plan can increase enrollment and public visibility. Other elements of the plan may spark their philanthropic interest, too. And because nothing signals institutional prominence like new construction, showcase key components of the campus master plan with prospective students and their families during campus visitation days. Supervised hard-hat or virtual tours of construction sites also build excitement toward the day of dedication. Invite trustees, alumni councils, parents, public officials, the media, and other key constituent groups.
- *Maintain valuable working partnerships with your vendors.* Virginia Wesleyan University has benefited tremendously from a long-term working relationship with Hourigan Construction. The firm built the award-winning, state-of-the-art Greer Environmental Sciences Center, opened in 2017 and housing a flagship academic program of the University. It was also chosen for the new Susan S. Goode Fine and Performing Arts Center project and has contributed to other key components of the campus master plan—13 major construction initiatives in all. In addition to hosting countless tours, working with the administration on cost efficiencies, and maintaining on-time, on-budget success, Hourigan shared the University’s vision for inspiring donors and recruiting students. The company’s enthusiasm for showcasing new campus facilities and its sensitivity to the mission, strategic direction, and regular business of campus life make it a premier construction partner.
- *Make sure your communications keep up with your growth.* Don’t keep your institutional success a

secret. During the transition period or shortly thereafter, evaluate your marketing and communications operation and make needed changes in personnel, budget, or strategy. We recommend a thorough identification and cultivation of specific audiences—internal as well as external. Remember that your on-campus partners such as faculty and students are vital to driving messaging and branding; they can help a new president build excitement for the planning and initiatives that will benefit them, too.

Presidential transitions—and ultimately the new administration and the institution it serves—benefit greatly from careful planning. Although not all colleges or universities are poised for success in the same kinds of ways, effective planning can spur new energy, growth, and transformation. Amid ever-increasing competition for students, dollars, and resources, no campus can afford a leisurely transition. Used well, those months will set the stage for the kind of growth and stability that help to ensure the survival of the institution.

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.

SECURING APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL AID IS AS IMPORTANT AS PROCESSING THEM IN A TIMELY MANNER

John W. Dysart
President
THE DYSART GROUP

Demonstrating to all students and their families how they can afford to pay for college is extremely important. Colleges and universities must make sure that they have financial aid processing operations that guarantee that both currently enrolled students and prospective students are packaged in a timely manner.

SECURING APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL AID CONTINUED:

Quick processing is a good start but is insufficient. Financial aid offices must also be charged with actively encouraging all students to apply for financial aid as early as possible.

The financial aid team at Purdue University Fort Wayne took aggressive steps this cycle to encourage aid applications and to package students quickly. Historically, the bulk of current students and admission applicants applied for financial aid late and were not packaged until the summer.

Dr. Krissy Creager, Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Student Success, implemented significant changes in process and policy this cycle in order to improve outcomes.

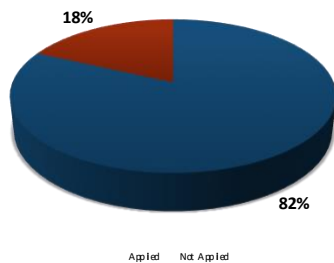
- The emphasis on early application and early packaging was explained to team members in the Financial Aid Office as well as key personnel involved with admission and student success.
- New weekly reports were created to track success in encouraging both new and returning students to apply for financial aid. That same report tracked progress in packaging students applying for financial aid. In addition, the report tracked progress in collecting any required documents necessary for disbursement. The weekly report informed decision-making on strategies and tactics designed to get all students to apply for financial aid early.
- Dr. Creager scheduled five *FAFSA Completion* events on campus to assist currently enrolled students with the application process. The key to the success of these events was advertising and publicity. The team ensured that the events received both print and television coverage. Professionals and computers were made available from 4:40-7:30 each evening to help students apply for financial aid.
- A series of reminder postcards were designed and mailed systematically to admission applicants and returning students who had not applied for financial aid.
- A systematic email campaign was utilized to encourage students to apply for financial aid.
- Text messages were sent to students who had not applied for financial aid when mobile telephone numbers were available.
- Admission counselors made telephone calls to admission applicants to remind them to apply for financial aid.
- Academic advisors also participated in the process. Advisors could see which of their currently enrolled students had applied for financial aid and they could incorporate reminders and encouragement in their communication with their advisees. The advisors encouraged their students to apply for financial aid by making telephone calls and sending email and text messages.
- Dr. Creager involved faculty members in the process. Faculty were educated regarding the importance of financial aid for retention. Faculty were reminded that applying for financial aid is an important predictor of full-time enrollment. Email reminders were sent each month to faculty to keep the importance of financial aid at the forefront of their minds as they worked to improve retention.
- A social media campaign was designed and introduced. The institution utilized Facebook and Twitter pushes to encourage students to apply for financial aid early.
- FAFSA completion postcards were placed at the Enrollment Services front desk along with instructions to remind every visiting student to apply for financial aid.
- Website banners were posted on the financial aid section of the website and appeared in rotating positions on the University homepage.

The success of all the initiatives is apparent when one considers the percentage of students who had applied for

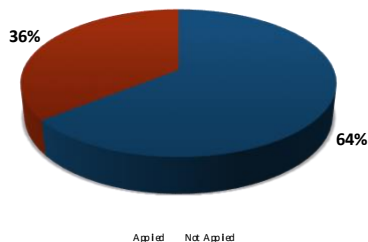
SECURING APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL AID CONTINUED:

financial aid by May 15, 2018. The financial aid application rates are among the highest I have seen that early in the cycle.

FINANCIAL AID STATUS FOR RETURNERS



FINANCIAL AID STATUS FOR ADMISSION APPLICANTS



While leadership must be commended, kudos must also be lauded on the financial aid team that accomplished this while completely changing the scholarship program, the financial aid process, hiring three new team members and completing **eight** financial aid audits!

Well done!



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