

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 4

OCTOBER 1, 2019

APPLYING STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT TO GRADUATE STUDENT RECRUITMENT

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The market for traditional, undergraduate students continues to be challenging. Demographic declines in the number of high school graduates have translated into fewer undergraduate enrollments at many colleges and universities. Enrollment managers, business officers and presidents are looking for new sources for headcount and tuition revenue.

Ownership

Historically, the recruitment process for graduate admissions has been housed within each graduate academic department. When demand is high and/or outcomes are not financially material, this model is fine. As traditional, undergraduate enrollment counts have dropped in recent years and new revenue sources have become critical, colleges and universities are making moves to transfer the recruitment operations to admission professionals.

If you are looking to increase graduate enrollments, the first thing to consider is

making the often politically difficult decision to remove the admission process from the academic division.

- Charge your Admission Office with the creation of a graduate recruitment plan.
- Design a series of weekly reports to track inquiries, applications, acceptances and deposits as a function of program.
- Allow the admission professionals to communicate with applicants to complete folders.
- Try and simplify the admission standard so that admission decisions can be made without involving faculty. If that is not possible, only include the graduate faculty in the process after folder completion and institute a maximum turnaround time for decisions.

Reconsider Admission Requirements

Competition has increased dramatically as more and more colleges and universities are adding graduate programs as they seek to create new sources of revenue. NCES reports that the number of graduate students in the United States has increased by 39% since 2000.

Outcomes could improve if the admission requirements are streamlined. I am not suggesting lowering the

ENROLLMENT MANAGER is a publication of **Dwyer Education Strategies, Inc.** Inquiries and comments can be mailed to dwyereducation@aol.com. An electronic version of the newsletter is available at www.dwyereducationstrategies.com.

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standards; I am more concerned with barriers such as letters of recommendation, required interviews, resumes and even graduate test scores.

Targeted Scholarships and Grants

While virtually every institution offers merit and need-based financial aid funds to undergraduates, many provide little or nothing to prospective graduate students. Consider expanding current institutional aid for graduate students.

- Graduate assistantships are terrific, but they tend to be available to only a few students. Offering even minimal scholarships to the majority of your admission applicants will make your program more attractive and you will stand out in the market.
- Structure scholarship offerings in a manner that makes them available for full-time and part-time graduate students. While 75% of undergraduates enroll full-time, only 57% of graduate students enroll full-time.
- Effectively market scholarships and grants as a mechanism to reduce debt. Graduate students are now responsible for approximately 40% of all federal loans. The median debt for graduate students is now \$57,600. The prospect of reducing debt for graduate students can be a powerful tool to secure enrollments.

Program Distinction

Offering distinct programs is obvious. Colleges and universities often field similar programs. Consider that half of master's degrees conferred were concentrated in just three areas: business, education and health professions.

If you are thinking about creating a new graduate degree in the most popular areas, at least add distinctive elements to the popular degrees.

When thinking outside the box about new programs, conduct the appropriate research. Evaluate regional and nations interest in new programs.

- Research the job market to ensure that your degree is likely to produce meaningful and lucrative career opportunities.
- Consider the creation of a business advisory committee to learn about credential needs in your local market.
- Don't be afraid to terminate graduate degree programs that are not generating enrollments.

Online

Traditional *brick and mortar* graduate programs are fine. Keep in mind, however, that NCES reports that in 2017, more than one-third of graduate students enrolled in at least some distance education.

- Making at least some of your courses available online will make enrollment easier for some students with work schedules and families.
- Graduate programs that can be completed online immediately opens your degree to a national market.
- Online content is often less expensive to create and support.

Optimized Customer Service

Graduate recruitment operations are sometimes understaffed or must rely on faculty members to communicate with graduate inquiries and applicants. Such a structure may not be conducive for the kind of rapid response necessary to communicate with prospective students. It is important to make sure that you are able to respond by telephone, email and text to any inquiry or to the receipt of an application for admission in a timely manner.

APPLYING SEM TO GRADUATE STUDENT RECRUITMENT CONTINUED:

Use Social Media

While social media alone is not likely to produce new student enrollments, having an updated presence on key social media sites can enhance exposure for your programs. Tout your programs on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

Invest in Retention

Do you have detailed retention in place for your current graduate students? The retention of students is important for both undergraduate and graduate students.

- Make sure you have student support services available to your graduate students.
- Communicate with your graduate students throughout their period of enrollment with an eye toward encouraging completion and to identify any obstacles facing them. Continually reinforce academic and career goals with your students.
- Monitor and stay in touch with stop-outs and provide academic plans to support their return to school.

Offer mentoring relationships and pursue communication mechanisms from successful graduates.

Enhance Your Website

The website is the most important electronic mechanism for graduate recruitment but is often overlooked by colleges and universities.

- Emphasize the ease of application for prospective graduate students.
- Demonstrate affordability and outline your value proposition.

- Focus on employment and career preparation and don't hesitate to show the probability of increased salaries and titles.
- Utilize video messages from faculty, current students, successful graduates and employers.
- Make use of search engine optimization to bring more prospective students to your website.

Inquiry Generation

Many schools focus their graduate efforts on admission applicants. It is equally important to have a plan to generate inquiries.

- Attend graduate fairs in your local area.
- Schedule visits to your feeder colleges at least twice per year.

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APPLYING SEM TO GRADUATE STUDENT RECRUITMENT CONTINUED:

- If you require a graduate test for admission, purchase the names of prospective students from the major testing services:
 - Graduate Record Exam (GRE)
 - Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)
 - Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
 - Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
- Develop relationships with large businesses in your local area and even consider specific scholarships for their employees.
- Actively seek referrals from faculty, staff, alums and current students.
- Schedule Open Houses or Information Sessions on your campus.

Comprehensive Communication Plan

Colleges and universities have been systematically communicating with undergraduate prospects and applicants for decades. It is common for institutions to have implemented sophisticated CRM systems for high school students and transfer students. The same is often not true when recruiting graduate students.

- Make use of targeted publications and include a direct mail campaign.
- Include faculty, graduates and current students in communication efforts.
- Use email to provide information to graduate inquiries and applicants.
- Include text messages in your communication plan.
- The telephone is still the most powerful tool but understand telephone conversations must often be initiated during the evening as prospective

students are usually at work or at school during the day.

Minority Recruitment

The enrollment growth at graduate schools from under-represented populations is out-pacing White, Non-Hispanics according to the Council of Graduate Schools.

- Ensure that your recruitment plan includes specific outreach to these populations.
- Consider creating partnerships with undergraduate programs at HBCU's or institutions that have historically enrolled large numbers of Hispanic students.

Recruit Your Undergraduate Students and Alums

Do not lose sight of the obvious.

- Actively market your graduate programs to your current undergraduate students.
- Consider curricular changes to make the transition from undergraduate to graduate seamless.
- Design an enrollment plan that will make it possible for your current undergraduates to obtain their graduate degrees in less time.
- Market your graduate programs to alums using systematic email.
- Include information about graduate school opportunities in your alumni magazine.

You can grow your enrollment at the graduate level if you are willing to make some changes. For many colleges and universities, academic reputation may be insufficient. Implementation of a detailed strategic enrollment plan for the recruitment and retention of graduate students can help increase enrollment, completion rates and revenue.

POSITION FOR STRENGTH: STAYING RELEVANT AND COMPETITIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
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For years we have shared experiential insight with college and university presidents on a wide variety of operational and philosophical issues. A common theme that has surfaced in these articles is the competitive nature of higher education, and the challenges confronting its leaders for enhanced revenue and relevance. In this issue, we make recommendations for winning in the tough arena of colleges and universities.

We especially thank our colleague John Dysart of The Dysart Group for his cutting-edge analysis and implementation of traditional and non-traditional enrollment models at our partner institutions. Over the past 30 years, we have found his market analytics abilities to be spot on.

The landscape of higher education is changing, and the bottom line is that if institutions do not adapt to it, their future viability will be doubtful. This is a time for bold action and strong leadership. Presidents and stewards of institutions need to step up and make the hard, yet necessary, decisions to not only meet the needs of their students and constituencies, but to exceed them.

Simply put, remaining stagnant will result in failure. What was once considered cutting-edge or innovative may no longer suffice. Complacency is dangerous. Day-to-day activity without a view to the big picture can prove to be expensive. This is why institutions need administrators who are forward-thinking and are determined to stay ahead of the curve. While it may seem daunting, it is possible for those who are willing to learn from others, take advice, do their research, and stay driven by their passion to effect real change.

Scott came to Virginia Wesleyan at a time of opportunity. The institution was at a crossroads, in need of revised business, enrollment, and advancement models, and Scott led VWU toward the path of transformation. Virginia Wesleyan continues to be profiled in national publications for its success story.

Recently, Scott was invited to submit a narrative describing the institutional transformation, as well as key "takeaway" points designed to inspire other institutions meeting the challenges confronting small and mid-sized colleges and universities today. The principals discussed can be explored in *Business Officer* magazine, the official publication of the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO). Read "Position for Strength" at: <https://www.businessofficermagazine.org/features/position-for-strength/>.

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.

A NEW HIGHER EDUCATION SCAM

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Much has been reported in recent months regarding the cheating scandals designed to provide admission to selective colleges and universities. Many were shocked to learn that parents essentially bribed coaches and administrators to gain admission for their children into elite institutions.

Cheating is always reprehensible, but the impact of the schemes was essentially denying admission to otherwise deserving students. Who knows how many qualified applicants were turned away? We may never know the real extent of such ploys. We all thought we had now heard it all.

A NEW HIGHER EDUCATION SCAM CONTINUED:

Reports in Illinois surfaced regarding parents who have given up guardianship of their children during their junior or senior year in high school so that the students could claim independence for financial aid classification and game the system for increased eligibility for need-based aid. Independent status means that parent income and assets are not included in the calculation for financial aid eligibility. While the practice may not have been technically illegal, it is morally corrupt.

The tactic depletes the available funds for both federal and state need-based financial aid. The state need-based grant in Illinois (MAP) is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Thousands of needy students are denied these awards each year as the money is depleted. Further, it taps the scarce institutionally funded resources available to provide access offered by colleges and universities.

Parents implicated in the scam included doctors and lawyers, real estate agents and education professionals. Parents were often informed of the strategy by "college consultants."

New regulations will need to be written for federal financial aid and states are likely going to need to make changes in state supported scholarships and grants in order to address guardianship changes. While we can all agree that college is expensive, manipulating the system to cheat your way to additional funds while depriving the same funds to needy families is inexcusable.

Did You Know?

According to The Hechinger Report, more than 168,000 eligible students were denied MAP grants in Illinois in 2017 because the program ran out of funds.



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Mark your calendar to meet with John Dysart, President of **THE DYSART GROUP** to discuss your enrollment and revenue needs at these upcoming conferences:

TRACS
Annual Conference
November 6-8, 2019
Hyatt Regency Orange County
Garden Grove, CA

ABHE
Annual Meeting
February 12-14, 2020
Rosen Plaza Hotel
Orlando, FL

ABACC
Annual Conference
February 24-28, 2020
Florida Hotel and Conference Center
Orlando, FL

American Council on Education
Annual Conference
March 14-16, 2020
Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina
San Diego, CA

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The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) announced plans to remove three provisions from the Statement of Principles of Good Practice. The move is in response to the two-year investigation by the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice into allegations that the principles constitute restraint of trade. The impact of the change is going to be significant and may alter the competitive landscape, especially late in the recruitment cycle.

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THE DYSART GROUP is a higher education consulting firm specializing in enrollment management. We have provided enrollment management services to nearly 200 colleges and universities throughout the United States with extraordinary results.

Admissions

We have worked collaboratively with colleges and universities to significantly grow enrollment. Our institution-specific recommendations have helped colleges and universities increase the number of admission applications as much as three-fold. Improved communication strategies and new tracking metrics have resulted in higher folder completion rates and increased the number of students accepted for admission.

Financial Aid/Pricing/Net Revenue

Client institutions have been able to transform policies and practices to significantly improve financial aid operational efficiency, design better targeted institutional scholarship and grant programs, stabilize or reduce discount rates and utilize scarce institutional aid resources to specifically support recruitment and retention objectives.

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