

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 3

JULY 1, 2020

AVOIDING SUMMER MELT AND RETAINING CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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The pandemic has altered the Fall 2020 landscape for every college and university. Enrollment professionals must always be concerned with and monitor retention and deposit withdrawals over the summer. It is likely, however, that more students are at risk this cycle.

- Financial aid and affordability are more important than ever. Be sure that you are tracking the number of deposited and currently enrolled students who have applied for financial aid and been packaged. Any student, currently enrolled or prospective, without a financial aid package is at risk. Check the status of financial aid packages. Immediately contact any students who may have been packaged for financial aid but are still missing required documents. Don't forget to be proactive in consideration of appeals as necessary.

- Communicate with all of your students. Make sure that your administrators have notified students of changes for Fall 2020 associated with social distancing and safety. Have course schedules been altered? Will students be attending some classes in person and engaging with others online? What changes will be made in living conditions in the residence halls? Outline enhancements to cleaning protocols. It is critical to communicate what should be expected to both students and their families.



- Complete the course selection (registration) process as soon as possible. Actively contact deposited and currently enrolled students in order to complete registration over the telephone or electronically.
- If your institution participates in inter-collegiate athletics, you

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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THIS NEWSLETTER IS PRINTED ON FSC, SFI & RAINFOREST ALLIANCE CERTIFIED PAPER

AVOIDING SUMMER MELT AND RETAINING STUDENTS CONTINUED:

must describe the approach students can expect based upon your latest information. Prepare a backup plan now in case your conference or association delays or cancels schedules. Sit down with your athletic professionals to discuss specific plans to retain student athletes should games be delayed or even canceled altogether. Are there other ways to engage these students in competitive activities? Are Esports an option?

- Provide necessary technology as needed. You need to be asking now if you have any currently enrolled or deposited students who do not possess the technology necessary for any online instruction you may be offering. Be prepared to make such technology available on a case-by-case basis. Include both devices and access portals.
- Designate staff to actively monitor individual state guidelines and restrictions as they may impact the ability of students to travel.
- Request that your student life professionals design plans for student activities under new restrictions including zoom interactions and meetings, remote service opportunities, virtual events and electronic games.

It is impossible to predict what will happen as so much remains fluid. Prepare in advance and remain flexible.



ENROLLMENT INNOVATION DURING COVID-19

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
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COVID-19 has presented higher education with many unique and unprecedented challenges. No institution has been spared its impact—national or global, public or private, liberal arts or research institutions, nor those with large or small endowments. It has become clear in the higher education landscape, however, that those who acted swiftly and thoughtfully appear to be in better shape than their competitors who waited to enact a plan.

The effects are felt far and wide across all areas of campus life, but perhaps where it is felt most is in enrollment. The pandemic arrived during what is considered the busiest time in university admissions as March and April is when high-contact activities are increased. It has upended traditional college recruitment, with prospective students largely unable to visit campuses in person, and the economic crisis will prevent many from attending college at all in the fall.

The visit to campus is a key factor—if not the most important factor—in a college decision. For the better part of the Spring, physical visits to campuses were not an option, and in Virginia where restrictions are now being loosened, many still feel uncomfortable with in-person tours. Accordingly, at Virginia Wesleyan University we have focused on two vitally important tactics: development of virtual visit opportunities and recruitment through digital communication and technologies.

Virtual Visit Opportunities

In early March as COVID-19 cases quickly began spreading in the United States, the VWU enrollment office clicked into virtual mode with the following engagement opportunities for prospective students and their families:

Virtual Open House: The format included a live and interactive recording, with campus representatives—

ENROLLMENT INNOVATION DURING COVID-19 CONTINUED:

administrators, faculty, and current students—in one place, spaced out at least six feet from one another.

Virtual Athletic Open House: This option provided prospective student-athletes with the opportunity to learn more about the institution's intercollegiate athletic program and ask questions. Coaches from all 22 of our NCAA Division III sports and our Athletic Director participated in the sessions conducted via Zoom.

Virtual Information Sessions: Daily sessions include a presentation by enrollment counselors followed by a Q & A session. Prospective students have the opportunity to engage in a virtual campus visit any day, any time. Time is spent with an enrollment counselor followed by interacting with a variety of administrators and faculty. Prospective students can choose from several options to meet representatives from academics, athletics, campus life, and financial aid. They can choose one of multiple options. These virtual visits are also conducted via Zoom and through a combination of pre-recorded materials and live interactive conversations with Q & A sessions.



Virtual Tours: While nothing can truly replace a physical visit, thankfully there is an option that comes close. A virtual, 3-D tour that includes video, photos, and an interactive campus map provides interested parties the option to visit the campus on any day, at any time, rain or shine.

Faculty Videos: Pre-recorded videos from faculty members representing each of our majors and academic programs is available, along with a fact sheet.

Student Videos: Often the most helpful piece of a campus visit for some students is hearing from current students. To ensure this element stays part of the experience, current student ambassadors pre-recorded videos discussing their college experience and highlighting what they love about Virginia Wesleyan.

Spreading the Word Through Digital Communication

While some of these tools were already in the pipeline for a long-term plan, our team suddenly had to work swiftly to develop, modify, and implement the strategy. Our enrollment team worked closely with the Office of Marketing and Communications to update the University's website to promote these opportunities for prospective students.

A targeted communications plan was developed for outreach and promotion of these options and included

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ENROLLMENT INNOVATION DURING COVID-19 CONTINUED:

our website, email, text, telephone and social media advertisement campaigns.

While these virtual tools were a plus prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, they can become critical to the higher education landscape moving forward.

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IT'S A GOOD TIME TO AUDIT YOUR WEBSITE FOR ITS APPEAL TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

John W. Dysart
President
THE DYSART GROUP

I am always surprised when reviewing enrollment management operations at colleges and universities how often I discover that the institutional website does not support recruitment efforts. While websites have been critical in the recruitment and financial processes for decades now, many colleges and universities have not taken even initial steps to upgrade the electronic experience for their customers. Given the current pandemic, the website has never been more important.

Most colleges and universities have adapted to the market and have redesigned their websites with the goal of attracting interest and making the site a valuable resource for information in the college selection process.

Navigation Ability Across Multiple Platforms

It is good practice to periodically check your website using several electronic devices. You will want to make sure that efficient navigation of the site is possible using laptops, desktops, tablets and mobile telephones. Check to ensure that navigation is easy using all available operating systems.

Photographs

It seems obvious to increase the number of photographs on your website and decrease the number of words. There are many websites, however, that remain visually unappealing and verbose. Pay particular attention to the academic and financial aid sections. These are often the worst offenders.



Videos

The only thing better than a good photograph is a compelling video. Videos are a terrific mechanism for communication.

- A. Keep the videos short. Most should last no more than one minute.
- B. Include videos from all the important influencers including students, parents of currently enrolled students, faculty, staff, the president, cabinet members, successful graduates and employers.
- C. Vary the locations by shooting videos from offices, athletic fields, gymnasiums, classrooms, residence halls, labs, libraries, the local community and appealing outdoor locations.

IT'S A GOOD TIME TO AUDIT YOUR WEBSITE CONTINUED:

- D. Pay attention to sound. Videos with excellent visuals and poor audio are ineffective.

Story Telling

The most important characteristic of your website should be a clear emphasis on telling stories. Facts and figures are important but not as influential as personal stories.

Campus Visits and Virtual Campus Visits

As another article in this issue argues, encouraging campus visits is critically important. During the pandemic, offering several visit options is beneficial.

Successful Alums

It is nice to hear from your President and other administrators about the benefits of your college or university. Nothing is more powerful, however, than hearing from individuals who have actually benefitted from attendance. Always include testimonials from successful graduates. Allow them to tell of their experiences in a personal way with an emphasis on how their time at your schools prepared them for a career.

Employers

It is beneficial for prospective students and their families to hear stories and endorsements from currently enrolled students and successful graduates. Do not forget to try and include testimonials from employers. Are there employers, especially in the local area, that have a history of hiring your graduates? Hearing from companies and individuals who can testify to the quality and employability of your graduates can be powerful.



Updates on the Plan for Fall 2020

As reopening continues in some areas while halted or slowed in others, making your plans for Fall 2020 is obviously important. As we progress through the end of the summer it is likely that current plans may change, and your website is a terrific mechanism to update plans as they evolve.

Your website must be evaluated, updated and constantly evolving. It is always a good time to review your website.

TEN FINANCIAL AID PRACTICES TO AVOID

John W. Dysart
President
THE DYSART GROUP

During these challenging times for enrollment managers, the focus tends to be on admissions. Enrollment managers are working to grow the inquiry base, better focus search strategies, increase folder completion rates and maximize yield. While juggling all of the recruitment issues related to admission, we can lose sight of the importance of the financial aid operation.

I have had the pleasure of visiting more than 200 colleges and universities throughout the United States and have taken detailed looks at the various approaches to financial aid. When identifying problems with approaches to financial aid, the missteps are fairly common.

1. Packaging Late in the Cycle

Financial season starts the first day of October. If your Financial Aid operation is not sending packages to new and returning students during the first week in October, you are hurting your ability to recruit and retain students.

2. Excessive Verification Requirements

The federal government is clear on which financial aid applicants must verify the information reported on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. If your college or university is selecting a large number of

TEN FINANCIAL AID PRACTICES TO AVOID CONTINUED:

additional applicants for the verification process, you are creating an unnecessary barrier to enrollment, increasing the difficulty for families in an already complex undertaking and creating more work for your financial aid staff members.

3. Excessive Forms

The existence of institutional aid applications, pre-printed appeal forms and frankly, any other institutionally created forms is a sign that your Financial Aid Office is complicating the process of applying for financial aid.

4. Complicated Appeals Processes

Financial aid appeals are generally not complicated. There are appeals that are always going to be denied. Parents of dependent children who just refuse to pay are not eligible for appeal consideration. In such cases, it is a waste of time for families and the staff in the Financial Aid Office to even begin an appeals process when it is known in advance that the basis of the appeal is going to be denied.

5. Unrealistic Packaging Policies

Budgets are tight, financial need is growing and colleges and universities are struggling to generate sufficient net revenue to support operations. In response, many institutions are freezing or cutting resources for institutionally-funded financial aid. If your college or university enrolls significant numbers of students with high financial need, cutting the financial aid budget may be

a disastrous move. While it is possible to make changes to packaging policies with the goal of increasing net revenue, make sure such changes do not make it impossible for needy students to enroll.

6. No Weekly Reports

It is imperative that every Financial Aid Office produce a weekly report that monitors financial aid expenditures. A meaningful weekly report must track success in securing financial aid applications from both new and returning students and should also track the percentage of admission applicants and currently enrolled students who have been packaged.

7. Insufficient Follow-Up

It is imperative that financial aid offices be charged with the task of effectively encouraging new and returning students to apply for financial aid. Quickly packaging financial aid applicants is not enough. Financial aid personnel should be taking active steps to remind students to apply for financial aid as early as possible.

8. Ineffective Reporting Structure

Financial aid is complicated, and the rules and regulations are complex and subject to constant change. Whether it is provosts, vice presidents for enrollment or chief financial officers, a reporting structure headed by an individual without a clear understanding of financial aid process, policy and philosophy is dangerous.

9. Unpredictable Expenditure Levels

It is vital that you have a packaging strategy where expenditures are reasonably predictable. If your institutional aid expenditures are virtually unknown until classes begin, it is a sure sign of a problem.

10. Under-Valuing Financial Aid Professionals

Financial aid professionals are often the over-looked professionals. They bring a considerable set of skills that must be recognized and appreciated. Understanding the value of your financial aid professionals is the first step in attracting and retaining talent.

Did You Know?

The median lifetime earnings for people with bachelor's degrees are double the amount for students with only high school diplomas.

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**

October 28-30, 2020
Hyatt Regency Orlando Int'l Airport
Orlando, FL

CIC Presidents Conference

January 4-7, 2021
Orlando, FL

**ABHE
Annual Meeting**

February 17-19, 2021
Rosen Plaza Hotel
Orlando, FL

**ABACC
Annual Conference**

February 22-26, 2021
Florida Hotel and Conference Center
Orlando, FL

**American Council on Education
Annual Conference**

March 20-23, 2021
Marriott Wardman Park
Washington, DC

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**Fall 2020 Enrollments at Risk
Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

-53% of high school students report family finances have been impacted by the pandemic

-41% of college students report the same

-22% of students report they may change their initial college attendance plans

-30% of high school student report they wish to stay closer to home

Website Maintenance

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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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