

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT IN A PANDEMIC YEAR

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Vice President for Enrollment  
Defiance College

This has been an unprecedented year in enrollment management as the pandemic changed everything. Colleges and universities were forced to make adjustments and modifications on the fly to adapt to new realities. So many obstacles, challenges and upheaval!

Defiance College in Ohio was certainly not immune from the altered landscape. Fortunately, the leadership team recognized the need for an abrupt change of course and somehow, we survived. Whew!



Tracey Dysart-Ford  
Vice President for Enrollment  
Defiance College

An Incident Command Team was created in March to address multiple issues. The team was charged with a number of tasks:

- Ordering safety supplies and cleaning products;
- The creation of a communication plan to keep currently enrolled, prospective students and their parents informed regarding the latest developments;
- Maintaining a close relationship with the local health department;
- Monitoring guidance, restrictions and best practices advocated by Ohio officials, as well as the White House and Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The safety of our students, faculty and staff was the number one priority. We met several times a week which insured that we are all on the same page and protecting our campus.

Specific steps were introduced to alter past enrollment management practices:

- Representatives in the Financial Aid Office actively solicited appeals to address the extraordinary financial impact of the pandemic on families and additional funds were

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ALLIANCE CERTIFIED PAPER

## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT IN A PANDEMIC YEAR CONTINUED:

allocated to ensure access for all prospective and newly enrolled students;

- Major adjustments were made to our website to tout new visit opportunities and to keep everyone informed about the latest news and updates;
- Defiance College transitioned from on campus visits to virtual visits;
- Zoom sessions often replaced financial aid inquiries previously addressed by telephone to enhance personal attention to concerns;
- Video tours replaced traditional campus visit tours;
- The entire orientation process was revamped to be conducted virtually;
- Personal intervention by admissions staff, coaches and faculty made for a successful orientation process;
- Gift boxes with t-shirts and other goodies were sent to every student participating in orientation;
- Changes were made to residence hall placements;
- Cleaning protocols in the residence halls were significantly increased and disinfecting practices added;
- What was once a succinct process for students at the start of the term turned into multiple days of socially distanced move-in activities.

The virus impacted other divisions on campus including academics. Moving to an online schedule was no easy task:

- Our faculty spent their spring break changing to an online format;
- Adjustments were made to course plans for digital format;
- Faculty kept in touch with our students via telephone calls and online meetings.

We knew this would be a big change and students had to adjust. One-on-one attention was never more powerful than this year. For example, at the end of the Spring term, usual business needed to be completed.

Faculty went above and beyond for graduation. While we held a virtual ceremony, faculty personally delivered diplomas to students at their homes in a socially distant format. Students in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana received personally delivered diplomas; students in states further away received their diplomas by mail in order to honor travel advisories important to health. The faculty dedication to our students was demonstrated in front lawns instead of at the ceremony site on the day scheduled for Commencement.

Through this time, many of us found ourselves at a loss at move-in as we had only met prospective students virtually during the previous months. For small colleges, that all-important feeling that students and families get when they step foot on our campus was not the same. What a joy it was to meet our new students in person. We recognized their voices as we had talked with them all year. We celebrated our new and returning students with balloons, gift bags from our president and her husband and a carefully spaced move-in from morning to evening for multiple days to keep everyone safe. Meeting our students in person was the best feeling in the world!

In times like these, a productive team approach is paramount. For my Enrollment Management Team, we had fun being creative, rethinking our strategies and tactics and focusing on aggressive personal attention with our prospective students to mitigate melt and increase enrollment. We learned that college admission and financial aid as we knew it had changed forever.

## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT IN A PANDEMIC YEAR CONTINUED:

The proof of a successful team endeavor is in the outcomes:

- Defiance College increased freshmen enrollment this year by 20%.
- The College posted the largest enrollment in five years, despite the pandemic.
- Graduate student enrollment grew by 55%.

Institutional transformation of the kind described here would not have been possible without strong leadership at the top. That is the college president. Dr. Richanne C. Mankey gave us the go ahead to do things differently and to take chances. She coordinated the institutional response and encouraged everyone as we navigated a long road characterized by uncertainty. In a recent campus update, Dr. Mankey said, "We continue to run a marathon race that has no designated finish line. My oft used quote from Robert Frost continues to inform our circumstance: "The only way out is through."

I received nothing but freedom to innovate and felt a trust from my president in such a difficult time. I am blessed as many of you are to have a great president. Dr. Richanne C. Mankey showed grace, courage and support like no other. It is in times like these that we all need to step back and say thank you to one of the greatest heroes in a pandemic: the college or university president. I hope you take some time to thank your leader too.

Congratulations to my colleagues. We made it! Thank you to our college and university presidents! You were there when we needed you!



*Dr. Richanne C. Mankey*  
*President*  
*Defiance College*

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## THE INFLUENCE OF FINANCIAL AID ON ENROLLMENT OUTCOMES

John W. Dysart  
President  
THE DYSART GROUP

It is easy to overlook the impact of financial aid policy and process on your enrollment counts and the financial bottom line. The truth is that the details of your institutional approach to financial aid will definitely influence recruitment success, retention rates, net revenue and thus your operational options.

Take a few minutes to answer some questions on your financial aid outcomes for the Fall 2020 cycle. It has been an unusual year for many reasons, but the COVID-19 pandemic, new enrollment patterns and retention challenges make the questions more important than ever!

- Did you have any new or returning students this Fall who enrolled without financial aid packages or with required documents still outstanding?

This is an unacceptable outcome for the student and for the institution. Students starting classes without a package or with outstanding required forms risk incurring substantial costs with no ability to pay. The usual outcome is students being forced out of school with outstanding balances. This prevents them from re-enrolling at your school and will likely kick them out of higher education for life, as most colleges and universities refuse to issue transcripts for students with unpaid balances.

- Were your final institutional aid expenditures not in line with your projections six to nine months ago?

If you do not have an award policy and institutional aid scholarship and grant programs that support accurate expenditure projections, then you have a problem. Financial aid outlays are not a crap shoot and well designed and effectively monitored institutional aid programs are relatively easy to budget.

- Did the amount of institutional aid expenditures this Fall come as a surprise?

Again, there should never be surprises regarding institutional aid expenditures. Expenditure surprises are a sure sign of a flawed design or lack of tracking.

- Are your net tuition revenue proceeds declining? Is your discount rate increasing without any corresponding growth in retention or the number of new students?

It is not necessarily a problem if aid expenditures increase and increases in the discount rate are not always avoidable. The key is understanding the reasons in advance and establishing appropriate policies and practices. If, for example, you are seeking to increase diversity, you may spend more in institutional aid. Unavoidable market realities like the current pandemic may result in higher discount rates as aggregate financial need grows. Look out for increased expenditures or higher discount rates that are not planned in advance or are not in line with institutional goals and priorities.

- Do you have concerns about the timing and amounts of your “merit” scholarships and whether these programs are generating interest in your institution and positively influencing new student enrollments?

Merit scholarships and grants can be a powerful tool to generate interest, applications and enrollments. Have you conducted reviews to determine whether the structure and timeline of your current programs are effective?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, it is time to review your financial aid operations to ensure that they actively support your recruitment and retention efforts, as well as provide sufficient revenue. Don’t hesitate to seek advice and counsel from outside enrollment professionals during these challenging times.



**MASKS  
SAVE  
LIVES**

## LEADING CHANGE DURING TURBULENT TIMES

### STEPS FOR BUILDING DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP

Dr. Marylouise Fennell  
Principal  
Hyatt-Fennell

Dr. Scott D. Miller  
President  
Virginia Wesleyan University

In his book *Prohibition Hangover*, author Garrett Peck states, "The problem with the enforcement of the Prohibition lay in the fact that nearly everyone thought the law applied to everyone else, but not to them." Similarly, many, if not most, people support the idea of institutional change in the abstract while eschewing it in practice.

Former Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust, a historian, has noted the "essential conservatism of human beings" for whom "change is frightening."

This could not be more true in today's higher education landscape. Recruiting and retaining students has never been more challenging nor required more new, creative, and strategic ideas in the face of the global pandemic and subsequent economic downturn. Those who truly embrace the economic and emotional impact of the times and devise a new strategy will be the most successful.

How, then, can we make institutional change less frightening, moving both quickly and strategically to implement it?

#### **Build a senior team committed to obtaining strategic, broad-based buy-ins.**

Writing in the July 2012 issue of the *McKinsey Quarterly*, Chris Bradley, Lowell Bryan, and Sven Smit, tout the importance of "regular strategic dialogue involving a broad group of senior executives." "Back in 2009," they continue, "we wrote an article whose premise was that pervasive, ongoing uncertainty meant that companies needed to get their senior-leadership teams working together in a fundamentally different way...we suggested

that the only way to set strategy effectively during uncertain times was to bring together, much more frequently, the members of the top team, who were uniquely positioned to surface critical issues early, debate their implications and make timely decisions."

#### **Forge relationships while focusing on tasks.**

Presidents coming into the office with the benefit of recent or ongoing institutional research and/or evaluation may be able to save time in the planning process. However, we submit, there is no substitute for face-to-face communication with key constituents, especially students and faculty. Holding regular office hours, using committees to recommend and implement change at a grass-roots level, and championing annual surveys of the community climate build support. Though time-consuming, they develop a strong base on which new strategic ideas can flourish. Short-circuit the planning process at your own risk.

#### **Communicate a passionate vision.**

As we wrote in the commentary entitled, "The College Presidency: Welcome to the Future," in *The Lawlor Review*, "the highest presidential priority is to develop and communicate an overriding plan. Without a passionate vision, a presidency risks gradually deteriorating into a mindless set of ad hoc circumstances."

"Too many presidencies," we note, "fall into the trap of managing from crisis to crisis, exhausting resources, staff, and themselves in the bargain."

Focusing on a vision, along with taking calculated risks, can build dynamic leadership and advance the institution.

#### **Find a coach.**

Josh Bersin is a noted management consultant and an expert on corporate leadership. He recently wrote an article entitled, "Why Leaders Must be Experts." A coach is not a manager or supervisor, but rather, someone who knows how to help you bring out your best. Further, this person has an uncanny ability to point out your weaknesses and help you learn to overcome them. Find someone you trust to help you develop or enhance needed skills.

## LEADING CHANGE DURING TURBULENT TIMES CONTINUED:



Keep in mind that an effective president is a coach to many. In an interview in *The Washington Post* in 2011, former Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust

*"We sought to serve those who could not afford us but who needed us. We nurtured and allowed our brokenness in order to give others a fighting chance at a better life. And their presence in our sectors provided us meaning and purpose as we undertook our life's work."*

**Dr. Mary Hinton  
President, Hollins  
University**

noted, "I've found that if you tell people that in order to have the things they most want and that most matter to them, they have to change certain other things, that makes those changes seem not just desirable, but imperative. And that seems to me a good path to lead people along as they face inevitable change."

This is a time of unprecedented change. There is no status quo, and our job as institutional leaders is to navigate the new future with a passionate vision while garnering support from our key constituents.

###

*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.*

### **According to National Student Clearinghouse Research Center**

*Undergraduate enrollment in  
the United States for Fall 2020 is  
down by 2.5%*

*Community College enrollment  
in the United States for Fall  
2020 is down by 8%*

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

**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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### **FairTest Reports:**

- Two-thirds of all colleges and universities are test-optional or test-blind for fall 2021 admission applicants
- Three-fifths of four-year colleges and universities are test optional for fall 2021
- More than 1,650 colleges and universities will not require ACT/SAT scores for fall 2021

### **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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