

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY JOB DESCRIPTION FOR AN ADMISSION PROFESSIONAL IN A POST-PANDEMIC, COMPETITIVE MARKET

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The college admission vocation has changed so much in the last 25 years. While the front-line influencers (admission counselors, advisors or representatives) are still the most important and influential professionals, their roles must evolve to meet the new challenges.

- Demographics are still discouraging as the decline in high school graduates will continue. Shifts in ethnicity, gender, levels of pre-enrollment preparation and ability to pay will be a constant for years to come.
- Even as several colleges and universities close, the competition for students is intensifying.
- We have not yet been able to measure the longer-term impact of the pandemic. Some may view the traditional, on-campus experience as less attractive.
- The declining ability of students and their families to pay, combined with stagnation of federal and state aid and rising tuition costs, will make

the demonstration of value and outcomes paramount.

What are the qualifications and skill-sets necessary to thrive as a front-line admission professional in this environment?

### Communication Skills

Communication skills have become more important than ever as institutional representatives seek to demonstrate value to prospective students and parents. Colleges and universities will need to hire individuals comfortable speaking on the telephone. They must be equally able to engage via text messaging, traditional email and social media. Face-to-face interview skills are essential as traditional visits to campus will be more influential than ever. The bottom line is that colleges and universities will be relying less on professionals with “folder review” talents as test requirements are permanently retired, and much more on communicative salespersons.

### Comfort in a Virtual Environment

The pandemic has shown that some students and families are more comfortable with virtual conversations via Zoom and other formats. This mechanism is unlikely to go away, even with higher vaccination rates.

### New Hours

In a competitive market with rising costs, communicating value must be a top priority. The best method for such communication continues to be the telephone and for most prospective college students, their availability for telephone outreach is limited. Most high school students are in school until late afternoon. The majority of working adults are engaged until 5:00. It should be clear that effective telephone outreach is likely to occur between the hours of 3:00 and 9:00. Some

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### Good News

This year, the United States is projected to award 983,000 Associate Degrees, nearly 2,000,000 Baccalaureate Degrees, 883,000 Master's Degrees and another 187,000 Doctorates.

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## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY JOB DESCRIPTION FOR AN ADMISSIONS PROFESSIONAL IN A POST-PANDEMIC, COMPETITIVE MARKET CONTINUED:

evening hours must be part of the work schedule for admission professionals in the new market.

### Less Travel and More Time in the Office

Historically, availability for travel has been a requirement for many admission counselors. The pandemic has revealed that recruitment objectives can be achieved without visiting high schools and attending college fairs. While such travel is unlikely to be completely eliminated in the future, given the expense and questionable value, travel will be significantly reduced. This will allow for more time in the office for meeting students and families in person, connecting by telephone and sending personalized digital messages via email and text.

### Social Media Content

Social media is important to target prospective students and to keep the interest of inquiries and applicants for admission. In social media, content is king and admission counselors must be able to update content often. This might mean attending more events on campus and keeping cell phone cameras handy to record activity.

### Better Understanding of Financial Aid and the Financial Aid Process

It should be obvious by now, but knowledge of the financial aid process and access to financial aid information is critical for admission counselors.

### Detailed Knowledge of Academic Offerings, Especially Outcomes

Admission counselors must be aware of the various academic majors on campus and must also be able to answer the following questions about each concentration:

What is unique about this academic offering? What are the distinctive credentials or experiences of the faculty? What types of jobs are available upon completion? Where are the jobs? What salaries can one expect? Are there natural progressions for graduate programs? Specifically, what jobs

have recent graduates of the program secured over the last two years?

The role of the traditional admission counselor is important, as it has always been, but the essential duties and skill sets are changing in a new marketplace forever changed by the pandemic.

## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT: THE NEW NORMAL

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The past 18 months have been anything but normal. While we are sure there is much we would all like to forget about the pandemic, there were some invaluable lessons learned and policies created that will affect enrollment practices for years and years to come.

Moreover, we can no longer hide behind the constraints of the pandemic and make excuses for our enrollment and retention efforts. After over a year of challenges—and overcoming those challenges—we must fully embrace our capacity to change with or without the catalyst of crisis.

With that in mind, we offer the following advice as we move into a post-pandemic new normal for the enrollment cycle to come.

### Keep What Works

Enrollment offices across the country not only reinvented the wheel but reimagined the wheel entirely when the world went remote in March 2020. Just because most parts of the country are reopening does not mean that the innovations created since then are now obsolete. Examine what really works and what is worth keeping. Students and families now expect some sort of remote option for those who cannot attend meetings and orientations in person. While hybrid events may be hard to manage, consider offering remote events after in-person events for those who were unable to attend. Accommodating students and families and meeting them “where they are” may help hook out-of-state recruits.

### Drop What Doesn't Work

If remote work hasn't been working for your enrollment operation, then call the team back to campus. If virtual visits

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were lackluster, then rethink your messaging. Has “test optional” elevated the caliber of the incoming class or has it just convoluted an already complicated acceptance process?

Just like before the pandemic, do what works best for your team and your strategy. Know that positive results are more important than trying to be everything to every student.

### Examine Your Core Values

If in-person instruction is a top priority for your institution and recruitment strategy, then consider all the ways you can ensure safe, in-person learning this semester. Don’t be afraid to make hard decisions. Students and families whose priorities and values align with your institution’s will appreciate the transparency and strong leadership.

The COVID-19 College Challenge is a great coalition of like-minded colleges and universities that have decided that mandating COVID-19 vaccinations for students and/or faculty and staff is what is right for their new normal. While much of the academic world is based on the tenets of freedom and diversity of thought, we are also a group that believes in science. We trust data, and the data shows that students want to learn in the classroom, not in the chat room. By requiring COVID-19 vaccinations, this is one-way colleges and universities can ensure that the students they have worked so hard to recruit remain healthy and enrolled in a thriving campus environment.

### Embrace Your Capacity to Change

National and local discussion of free community college for students who meet certain criteria requires many colleges and universities to adapt now. Examine your stack-on offerings. Add more in areas of national interest—early childhood education, computer and data science, supply chain management, and more.

Many students are now pursuing master’s degrees, which means three things:

- 1) Current, relevant master’s programs should be highly promoted.
- 2) New master’s programs in growing areas should be added quickly.
- 3) The cost of a bachelor’s degree is more important than ever as many students will be taking on more debt for a master’s degree.

Helping new students see the value of your institution—through cost, cooperative employment options, retention, and support efforts, and/or graduate school opportunities—is paramount to surviving in this post-pandemic world.

Like anything “new,” our new normal will likely come with a honeymoon phase where the novelty of in-person prospective student visits and events will result in a flood of inquiries and interest. It is important to remember that the challenges of the last year have not simply disappeared because we’re no longer wearing facial coverings. Producing positive enrollment results, especially at small, private institutions, will be essential to helping colleges and universities return to a healthy bottom line; and thus, back to a more normal environment.

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College enrollment declined by 3.5% in the spring term compared to last year. That represents approximately 600,000 fewer students, which is the greatest annual drop in a decade according to the national Student Clearinghouse Research Center.



READY FOR THE  
NEW NORMAL?

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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.

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