

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

VOLUME 17, ISSUE 4

OCTOBER 1, 2021

## EMORY & HENRY COLLEGE ENROLLS LARGEST CLASS IN 185-YEAR HISTORY, DESPITE THE PANDEMIC

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group

I had the pleasure of working with Dr. John Wells when he was chief academic and enrollment officer at a University in North Carolina. During our collaboration, the University enrolled the largest number of new students in at least thirty years.

Dr. Wells assumed the presidency at Emory & Henry College in 2019. He was faced with a declining enrollment exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We collaborated to implement a new recruitment and financial aid model. In Fall 2021, the College was able to increase freshmen enrollments by 63 percent despite the challenges of declining demographics in the local area and the pandemic.



Dr. John Wells

So many colleges and universities have struggled with enrollment in recent years and the impact of the pandemic has been disastrous for most. How was Emory & Henry College able to overcome the obstacles?

### 1. Leadership

Over the last four decades, I have found that effective leadership is the most important element for enrollment success. It starts at the top, with the President who is charged with providing the institutional vision but does not end there. EHC benefitted from the guidance of Dr. Wells, but also from strategic planning and implementation from the Vice President for Enrollment Management and External Affairs, Jennifer Pearce. An equally vital role was played at the tactical level by the Director of Admission, Traci Harrison. The coordinated efforts of these leaders enabled the institution to quickly execute the new initiatives

### 2. Market Expansion

The location of the College in Southwest Virginia presented unique demographic obstacles, as the population has dropped by nearly nine percent over the last decade. Institutional representatives continued to maximize recruitment outcomes in the local area while expanding the geographic reach into new markets.

### 3. Virtual Experiences

Emory & Henry College made sure to offer traditional campus visits as safety circumstances allowed but offered virtual options to learn about the College as well.

### 4. Realistic Financial Aid

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**THE DYSART GROUP**  
Congratulates the following clients on 2021 growth, despite the pandemic!

Emory & Henry College  
+ 63%

Virginia Wesleyan University  
+ 5%

Alice Lloyd College + 19%

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

## EMORY & HENRY COLLEGE ENROLLS LARGEST CLASS IN 185-YEAR HISTORY CONTINUED:

Effective enrollment management requires an understanding of the students and families your institution serves as well as an awareness of evolving market realities. For decades, Emory & Henry College has served the residents of Appalachia, where nearly 25% of adults aged 18-24 fall below the poverty line. COVID-19 served to make a bad situation even worse. The financial aid packaging plan for the College took the pandemic and the fiscal challenges of prospective students into consideration. In some cases, economic realities required greater investment of institutional aid resources.

### 5. Personalized Communication

Individual, personal communication with prospective students and their families is crucial. Too many colleges and universities rely on generic blast messages and these students can see right through them. Utilization of individual test messages and personal telephone outreach supplemented by email and traditional mail has proven to be most effective.

### 6. Program Expansion

Dr. Wells and his leadership team are always evaluating product offerings for enhancement. Emory & Henry College continues to improve current programs while adding new academic and co-curricular options in response to the proven needs of the market. New majors and new activities are added considering student demand and interest.

The team at Emory & Henry College succeeded during a period when many colleges and universities experienced headcount and revenue decreases. Your institution can realize growth even during these difficult times by using some of the strategies outlined in this article.



## FROM THE FRONT LINE OF ADMISSIONS

Dr. Marylouise Fennell  
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These days, most colleges exist in a buyer's market. Prospective parents and their students have an unprecedented array of higher education options from which to choose — large and small, public and private, four-year and two-year, online and for-profit. The notion of “college” has long since ceased to denote only the residential, four-year experience, and the ongoing pandemic has only underscored this more. Now you can assemble a higher-education package as easily as you can buy furnishings for a new house.

What's changed?

Higher education is — hold your ears, academic purists — a consumer-driven business. Individual preference rules, though there's nothing new about promoting the advantages of choice. But now students and their families have more choices than ever.

A growing trend is trumping a student's financial aid offer from a competitor. In one study, 38 percent of American college admissions officers indicated in that they continued to court prospects even after the students had committed to another institution. In some cases, not only are financial-aid packages matched or exceeded, but the student's original deposit to the other college is covered as well.

Photographing beautiful campus buildings for printed publications has given way to launching precision strikes via social media. It's faster and cheaper to reach students where they dwell rather than to print a fancy brochure that increasingly they don't read.

All of this makes perfect sense. What is less clear is how to keep students once they enroll. As with any business, it takes twice the effort to lure a new customer than to retain an existing one. Most competitive colleges do an admirable job of employing analysis on the front end, the recruitment and matriculation stages, but less so on the vitally important area of the actual collegiate experience. Anecdotal evidence, social media communications, exit surveys and the like offer some clues. But where much of higher education fails today is useful assessment of living and learning on campus.

A notable exception is the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) which measures “the amount of time and

## FROM THE FRONT LINE OF ADMISSIONS CONTINUED:

effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities” and “how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning.” Comparative data reveal how happy — or dissatisfied — students may be with those of peer institutions.

Colleges also do well to encourage employees to keep their ears to the ground, listening for what works and what doesn't among today's student consumers. This is especially important for front-line staff in the offices of enrollment and financial aid, housing/student affairs, the finance department, and the registrar. Although some institutions have aggressively pursued customer-service training and quality-control measurement, such exercises often go the way of campus strategic plans — directly to a shelf in the library.

The admission war is increasingly high-tech, and the stakes are higher than ever. Senior administrators devote many hours to individual recruitment of students, spending time with prospects in their offices, reaching out to parents and siblings and making the process as personal as possible. Scholarships remain the cornerstone of fundraising. Rural and urban campuses alike try to always remain photo ready as all prospective students have their own following on social media that could affect your next recruiting cycle.

We know that competition for students will occupy more of our time and resources. With a declining college-aged population, we are already fighting over fewer prospects and offering more incentives to enroll and stay. Cost as well as perceived value will determine the fates of many, many institutions.

We will need to stay at the top of our game in every respect to win our individual admissions wars. Not only is failing not an option but judging from the intensity of competition in higher education now, we would say that even success is a relative term.

These days, you're only as good as your next freshman class.

*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.*

## REACHING OUT TO STUDENTS LOST DUE TO VACCINATION POLICIES

John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group

Colleges and universities have lost students this year because of their COVID-19 vaccination policies. Some currently enrolled students opted not to return, and some prospective students elected to postpone enrollment or attend a competing institution due to vaccination policies. Still others took advantage of an option to attend class virtually.

I'm not interested in getting into a discussion of which approach to vaccines is best for colleges and universities. The truth is that some students elected not to enroll because they did not want to be vaccinated and others elected not to enroll to avoid being in contact with unvaccinated individuals.

Regardless of your policies regarding vaccinations, it makes sense to have a plan in place to re-recruit these students, if possible.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reports that college enrollment fell by 3.5 percent year over year -- the largest year-over-year drop in a decade.

1. Make sure you keep track of the currently enrolled students who did not return. Initiate telephone, text message and email communications to keep them updated on evolving requirements and conditions.
2. Do the same for any deposited students who withdrew late in the cycle because of vaccine policies.
3. Stay in touch with the students who have enrolled virtually to keep them engaged and updated as well. Begin now to prepare them for the option of returning to in-person classes.

Regardless of your institutional policy, understand that conditions are likely to change over the next twelve months. It is best to be able to welcome students back to the fold if conditions allow.

## **ENROLLMENT MANAGER**

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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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