

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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ALICE LLOYD COLLEGE INCREASES ENROLLMENT, DESPITE PANDEMIC

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Alice Lloyd College has a unique mission and is a distinctive institution. It is dedicated to serving students in the Appalachia region and is one of only a handful of work colleges in the United States. At Alice Lloyd, the work college designation means that students do not pay traditional tuition.

- Like many private colleges and universities throughout the United States, Alice Lloyd College experienced declines in enrollment over the last few years.
- Access is a critical issue even for a college that does not charge tuition, as fees for room and board can be a challenge when 54% of the student population is eligible for Federal Pell Grants.
- The institution faced declining demographics in its target area.
- Appalachia has college attendance rates lower than the national average.
- Enrollment challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic.

I partnered with the team at Alice Lloyd College to introduce a new recruitment plan and modernize the approach to financial aid.

New Leadership

- The introduction of a new plan begins with new leadership. Tori Nairn, the Director of Financial Aid, was promoted to Director of Enrollment Management. She established a group of key personnel from important divisions throughout the College to act as a collaborative team to review options, adopt new strategies and tactics and implement new initiatives.

New Reporting Mechanisms

- Reports needed to be redesigned to monitor performance more effectively.
- Specific metrics were included to inform decision-making throughout the cycle.
- The weekly admission funnel report was revised to better assess outcomes.
- A financial aid report was created to track financial aid application rates for both new and returning students and packaging rates.
- A report was created to monitor admission counselor telephone and text outreach.

Targeted Travel

- The pandemic changed travel plans for all colleges and universities. Leadership at Alice Lloyd took the opportunity to re-evaluate travel destinations and programming for the long-term, making for a more efficient use of institutional resources while still generating student interest.

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New Year, New U: The Contemporary Transformational Model for Liberal Arts Colleges

Undergraduate enrollment has fallen 3.2 percent in comparison to last year according to The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. This represents the largest two-year decline in 50 years.

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

ALICE LLOYD COLLEGE INCREASES ENROLLMENT, DESPITE PANDEMIC CONTINUED:

Systematic Communication

- The admission counselors increased communication efforts with prospective students and applicants for admission.
- A new email campaign was introduced to keep in touch with students throughout the entire recruitment cycle.
- A text messaging campaign was designed for more immediate communication with prospective students.
- Telephone outreach has been significantly increased to enable counselors to better develop personal relationships with both students and their families.

Focus on Folder Completion

- The admission team focused on folder completion this cycle and increased the number of students accepted for admission dramatically.
- More accepted students translated into more financial aid packages demonstrating the inherent affordability of the College.

Emphasis on Videos

- The admission team worked collaboratively to produce several new videos.
- Video content on the website became a better source of information about the College.
- Video messages were even sent directly to the admission applicants. The video messaging was much more effective than traditional text.

Early Financial Aid Packaging

- Financial aid packages were mailed much earlier this year.
- The Financial Aid Office systematically communicated with both new and continuing

students to encourage students to apply for financial aid early.

- Demonstrating affordability early in the cycle supported both recruitment and retention objectives.

Implementation of a new model with bold changes enabled institutional leaders to enroll the largest class since 2015.

NEW YEAR, NEW U: THE CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL FOR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
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President
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It's 2022, and the future is now. In enrollment, we cannot afford to wait until things "go back to normal." There is no normal, anymore. There is only now and how we're going to make our goals now and in the future.

Despite all the changes and challenges since 2020, enrollment models that focus attention on graduate, special session (mini-term), early enrollment (pre-collegiate), and online (non-traditional) remain highly successful. The world has changed, and thus, our students have changed. Continuing to focus attention on an enrollment model that reflects service to diverse student markets will continue to yield fruitful results.

The model is based on over 30 years of experience leading liberal arts colleges and research we conducted with over 150 college and university presidents; information we have shared during the past 18 years through two popular thought series for higher-education presidents nationwide. "Presidential Perspectives" (www.presidentialperspectives.org) and "President to President" (www.president2president.com) are higher education leadership series written by college presidents for college presidents.

This year's series, titled "The Vitality and Power of Higher Education," examines how higher education is emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with renewed vitality, a powerful community presence, and a stronger and more personalized student experience for all.

That personalized student experience needs to start from the first inquiry and remain through every interaction, all the way to

NEW YEAR, NEW U CONTINUED:

the top. A winning enrollment strategy starts with a president fully committed to a comprehensive enrollment plan based on an overarching vision for the institution. The Board must understand and visibly support the setting of large but realistic goals, and sustainable viability, to be achieved by the president (“the primary spokesperson and advocate of the strategy”) and his or her team.

In successful strategic planning, objectives should be realistic enough to inspire consensus and commitment to results. To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- Commission an independent Institutional Review to evaluate current conditions and assess opportunities. This will provide the basis for a four-part comprehensive planning model including space-utilization study, condition assessment, 10-year master plan, and strategic plan.
- Utilize experienced counsel to develop an enrollment matrix that will control the discount rate, produce a significant return on investment, and evaluate staff effectiveness. Staff evaluations should be based on specific objectives and outcomes. If the last time this was done was in “panic mode” during the height of the pandemic, reevaluate now with a clearer head. Every student in the headcount matters, as does every staff member on payroll.
- Dedicate gift dollars and, if necessary, some leveraged borrowing to build or renovate high-impact facilities. The pandemic revealed that place matters, and traditional students prefer to do most learning in-person. With this in mind, “tired” classrooms, grounds, and facilities, not to mention inadequate technology, create a drag on the entire enrollment process. Transformational presidents recognize the importance of attractive facilities and look for creative ways to fund improvements. Athletic facilities -- artificial turf, lights, all-weather tracks, and improved locker, training, and weight facilities-- are a useful starting point. (The revitalized facilities can enable the institution to attract a new brand of coach, responsible for recruiting scholar-athletes who will be successful on and off the field or court.)
- Add extra-curricular and co-curricular activities that will utilize these facilities and boost enrollment. (A marching band will also support the music program, for example.)

We also suggest:

- Consider the use of part-time staff for call center and contract services to supplement research and branding staff.
- Create cost-effective, synergistic partnerships to support the library, learning resources, and technology all-important to ensuring student success.
- Supplement traditional program growth with a modest but student-centered, non-traditional adult program. Online offerings often succeed here.
- Utilize branding and marketing dollars wisely. Although most successful brands are not created overnight, judicious use of resources can result in a highly effective, long-term strategy.
- Develop a comprehensive internal communications plan that will help to drive the external one. Briefing faculty, staff, students, and volunteers on goals and successes and keeping them on message will pay dividends in public opinion and fundraising, and, even more important, in enrollment and retention.
- Periodically utilize external counsel to evaluate results objectively and recommend areas for improvement from an informed, outside perspective.
- Ensure that the president is visible at all admissions open houses, as well as parents and family weekends. Remember that he or she is not only the chief spokesperson for the institution but also its best sales executive.

In the highly competitive, supercharged enrollment landscape of today, no institution can afford to be complacent or to rely on strategies of the past. That means that progress and sustainability in enrollment depend on a forward-looking, innovative, and integrated recruitment strategy. It begins with the president, is sustained by bold but realistic thinking and planning, benefits from investment in infrastructure, and relies on motivated, regularly evaluated staff.

Have no doubt: enrollment will remain challenging in this new year and into the future. Only by strategizing and evaluating often with the president as a key player can enrollment offices rise to meet those challenges and succeed.

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

We have worked collaboratively with colleges and universities to significantly grow enrollment. Our institution-specific recommendations have helped 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. New student enrollments have grown by as much as 70% in a single cycle while discount rates have been controlled. Proven strategies have increased retention rates by as much as 7% in one year.

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