

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## HOW ALUMNI RELATIONS CAN BOOST ADMISSIONS—AND VICE VERSA

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Active and engaged alumni are a vital component of any college's long-term success. But while alumni support is obviously crucial in areas like philanthropy and public relations, there's one important opportunity that many higher education institutions overlook: the potentially electric connection between alumni and admissions.

Your alumni — especially recent graduates — are better equipped than almost anyone else to tell prospective students what makes your school so special. Their experience, perspective, and passion can be a tremendous asset to your recruiting and enrollment efforts. The key is to find impactful ways to connect your school's alumni with your new and potential students.

Here are several ways that your admissions and alumni relations departments can benefit from finding new ways to collaborate.

### Establishing Your School as a Lifelong Community

It's no secret that social media and COVID-19 have greatly disrupted the social aspects of school, leading to a widespread feeling of disconnection and loneliness among Gen Z, who often struggle to make friends. As a result, young people are actively searching for community, connection, and a feeling of belonging. By involving your alumni in the recruitment, onboarding, and mentorship process of new students, you can position your school as a learning institution that strengthens social bonds and fosters lifelong friendships, which is the kind of meaningful connection many prospective students crave. Furthermore, by introducing prospects to alumni, you demonstrate that graduates of your program are eager to stay in touch and give back to the next generation, which speaks volumes about the value of your education.

### Previewing the "Real World" for Incoming Students

What does life look like after college? For a high school senior who hasn't even committed to a college yet, that question could sound premature. But the better these students understand what their degree will lead to, the wiser they'll be when making decisions throughout their college years. By sharing spotlights of successful alumni in their field of interest, or even inviting alums to host "real world 101" workshops for new and prospective students, you can prove your commitment to setting enrolled students up for long-term success.

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## FAFSA Delays

**31% fewer high school seniors have filed the FAFSA this cycle compared to the same point last year. Experts say low-income are the most likely to be impacted by the delay.**

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PRINTED ON FSC, ECOLOGO/UL, CFPA & ANCIENT FOREST FRIENDLY CERTIFIED PAPER

## HOW ALUMNI RELATIONS CAN BOOST ADMISSIONS CONTINUED:

### Mentoring Students to Increase Their Odds of Success

Alumni who enjoyed their college experience often want to find ways to stay connected and give back, though they may not always be able to do so through monetary gifts. For this reason, establishing a mentorship program that matches willing alumni with interested students in the same degree program is a fruitful investment for everyone involved: new and prospective students receive first-hand academic and career advice from someone in their field, alums feel better engaged with their alma mater and valued as contributors in the school's continued success, and the school itself will likely enjoy greater engagement from mentored students both during their education and after they graduate, as they may be inclined to join the mentorship program in order to help the next generation of learners just like them.

### Providing Lifelines for Struggling Learners

What are the top challenges that cause students in your program to struggle or drop out? Which alumni faced similar challenges, but overcame them? Consider working with your alumni relations team or even with instructors directly to identify alums who might have insights on these issues. They can offer students heartfelt advice because they were in the same situation not too long ago.

### Serving as a Role Model for First-Generation Students

Students whose parents didn't attend college sometimes need extra help navigating the college world. Having a "big brother/big sister" alumni role model who can provide relatable guidance may reduce the stress of these situations and increase the retention and success rates of students who may lack effective support from other sources.

### Increasing Referrals of Like-Minded Students

The best evaluators of potential new students just might be your school's former graduates. You might offer a recommendation program through which your alumni can refer a potential student to the school. If that student

enrolls, the alum receives a referral fee. This incentivizes alumni to keep an eye out for young people they think would be a good fit for a school they know very well.

### Amplifying Alumni Giving

Forming a strong relationship with alumni relations isn't just a one-way benefit for admissions. Alums who are actively involved in their alma mater are more likely to donate as well. This means working together between departments can not only boost enrollment — which therefore leads to even more alumni down the line — but it can also boost your institution's endowment, too.

### Reframing How You View Each Applicant

Likewise, don't just think of prospective students as potential enrollees. Instead, view each of them as a future alumnus with the ability to help generations of students who come after them. But remember, what they'll tell others about their time in college starts with admissions, so be sure to treat them like honored alumni from day one.

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## THE FINANCIAL AID DISASTER 2024

**John W. Dysart**  
President  
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The federal government through the Department of Education pledged to simplify the process for applying for financial aid. The new process would be easier and provide a streamlined user experience. The new formula would ensure more low-income students would be eligible for Federal Pell Grants. The rollout of the formula and process has been a complete disaster.

- While the financial aid season launched in October for both students and financial aid

offices, the changes resulted in significant delays. The timeline for students moved from October to January for students and families still encountered obstacles and delays. The timeline for schools moved from October to early March, to the middle of March, and now the end of March.

- The formula has been delayed due to bugs. The Department discovered an error in the calculation regarding the treatment of inflation and was going to move forward without making a correction until public backlash forced a change.
- Families seeking financial aid are being forced to wait an additional five months to determine their eligibility.
- Colleges and universities are just now receiving calculated eligibility for some students, but a new issue was discovered which means that more than 200,000 applications will need to be recalculated.
- It is a nightmare for families and students, especially for those with high financial need.
- The delays have obliterated options for financial planning.
- The number of students who have applied for financial aid this year has dropped. It has been projected that as many as 2,800,000 fewer students will apply for financial aid this cycle, a drop of 20% compared to previous years.
- The fiasco is going to directly impact enrollment for both students and institutions. For colleges and universities still recovering from the pandemic, many are likely to experience declines in enrollment for both new and returning students.
- It is possible, given trends in recent years, that the issue may force some schools to close.

The Department of Education has announced steps to mitigate the problem.

- Fewer financial aid applicants will be selected for verification.
- The Department will suspend program reviews through the end of 2024.
- There is an announcement to deploy teams to select colleges and universities overwhelmed by the impact of the delay.

Institutions are doing all that they are able.

- Many have delayed or eliminated the deadline for students to commit to enrollment.
- Many have been forced to hire additional personnel and invest more in communication efforts at a time of budget stress.
- Colleges are preparing to deal with backlash from students negatively affected by the formula changes such as students from families with multiple children in college.

Everyone is forced into a wait and see mode. The impact of the disaster on college enrollment is difficult to predict. The negative implications for enrollment are likely to vary by institution type, with private colleges and universities likely to bear the brunt of enrollment declines.

It is unfortunate that poor planning, technical difficulties and terrible execution will discourage some students from attending college, create financial difficulties for families with significantly less time for financial planning and cause material enrollment and revenue shortfalls for many colleges and universities.



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**THE DYSART GROUP** is a higher education consulting firm specializing in enrollment management. We have provided consultation services to more than 225 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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