



SUNGARD HIGHER EDUCATION

What can we help you achieve?

Relationships Matter: Strategies for Connecting with the 21st Century Student

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INTRODUCTION

The seismic shifts in the ways that students consume information, share ideas, and communicate with the world around them put traditional recruiting and admissions approaches at risk. To meet institutional goals by effectively targeting, recruiting, and admitting students, particularly amid the clutter of proliferating media, colleges and universities must engage in a far more strategic and calculated approach to enrollment.

While new technologies, for example, automating mass email communications, make some things easier, new challenges have arisen. Today, the response rates are falling as students resist efforts to be ‘poured’ into an enrollment funnel. Increasingly, familiar approaches are less effective and often do not take into account long-term, and possibly negative, effects. Evidence is increasingly clear that the influence of enrollment marketing initiatives is diminishing and mistrust of marketing is on the rise. At the same time, the internet helps students develop their ideas about your institution well before their first formal contact with it. Consequently, awareness building through mass communication provides little value to students who have already advanced further down the decision path, worse it misses them entirely.

To be successful today, recruiting and admissions teams must consider new factors. Connecting with the 21st century student requires an approach informed by a deep understanding of each student as well as alignment of relevant recruitment and admission activities with a student’s decision cycle. More often than not, today’s enrollment process is a path with alternate entry and exit points, a complex network of information, influencers, and decisions.

What does this mean for enrollment managers? It means there is great opportunity. Enrollment managers can thrive in this challenging environment. How? By treating relationship building as an institutional value and area of competence that must be developed, by engaging in evidence-based recruiting and admissions planning and strategy, and by employing technology that is capable of powering and supporting key activities.

COMPETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The message is clear. Demographics are shifting. Projected declines in the number of high school graduates, dramatic shifts in racial and ethnic diversity, and concerns over rising institutional costs are well-

documented issues facing colleges and universities. “Build it and they will come” is no longer a viable approach to enrollment strategy as opportunities for easy growth are diminishing.

In particular, those institutions wed to either a mass market view or a traditional recruiting and admissions model will face increasing challenges as core markets for “traditional” populations ebb and a much more diverse market, primarily composed of adult learners, grows¹. In addition, geographical boundaries no longer serve as a competitive barrier with the rise of online and distance learning programs.

Savvy institutional leaders will benefit significantly by taking a holistic view of the student lifecycle and implementing a student-centric enrollment philosophy. Such an approach incorporates disparate student intake points into a comprehensive strategy that includes undergraduate (first-year and transfer) admissions, graduate and professional school admissions, workforce development and customized training, and continuing education registration.

At its core, such an approach is about relationships. College and university leaders who act today to identify, capture, understand, and nurture ongoing student and constituent relationships will acquire a lasting competitive advantage. By actively managing the student across the enrollment lifecycle – from prospect to student, to alum, to continuing learner – the relationship established provides long-term value to both the student and the institution (see figure 1). This comprehensive view requires colleges and universities to develop, implement, and maintain enrollment plans as a strategic imperative.

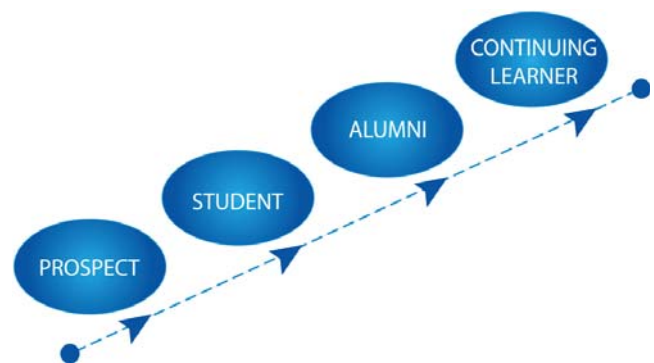


Figure 1

¹ Digest of Education Statistics, 2005, National Center for Education Statistics

This approach, which treats management of student relationships as an essential skill, is increasingly critical for institutions as they seek a competitive advantage in today's media-saturated world. Fortunately, new enrollment management technologies, developed specifically for higher education, are capable of supporting this relationship-focused approach. Such systems, built on an understanding of relationships as valued assets, reach far beyond the capabilities of transactional systems and data maintained on most campuses today. As a result, enrollment professionals, increasingly challenged to vie for student attention, will be able to make use of far richer, more robust insight into those relationships. They will be able to design, execute, and measure the success of programs that target specific behavior and intent, rather than repeat increasingly ineffective methods that focus on reaching a relatively anonymous, mass audience.

The Path to Enrollment Has Changed...

Any professional who has spent any time in enrollment management has heard that things have changed. How? Traditionally, the path to enrollment has been measured by a transactional, largely linear, progression through the enrollment funnel (see figure 2). This progress was defined by the stages of inquiry, applicant, and admitted, deposited, and enrolled students.

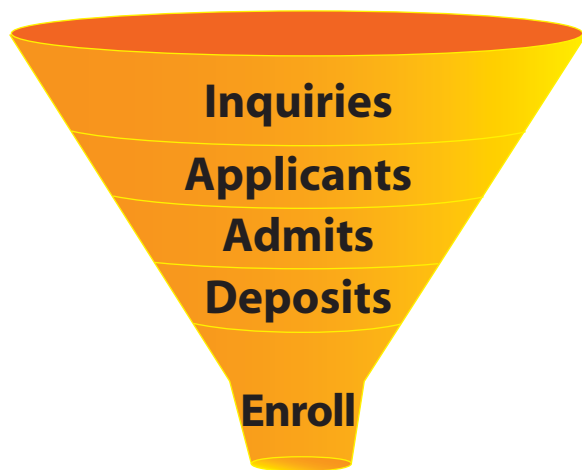


Figure 2

In the traditional model, prospective students follow a lock-step decision process most commonly initiated by mass marketing communication. The model depicts the process as moving from initial awareness, to consideration, to commitment. Achieving success in this model is relatively straightforward. If the top of the enrollment funnel is loaded with as many prospective students as possible, the result would be

a largely predictable and targeted incoming class of students. In the model, the potential student enters the funnel as an inquiry and a triggered communication and recruitment plan is pushed out when – and if – the student progresses through the subsequent stage gates within the funnel.

Now, however, many in enrollment management are finding this archetypal model is generating diminishing returns.

By the time a student has identified an interest in an institution, he or she is likely to have already gathered a solid baseline of information about the school. From perusing websites, to learning about institutions from peers, to social networks, to other technologies, students are making emotional attachments to institutions well before college and university staffs are aware of their interest. As a result, fewer students enter the top of the funnel ready to be molded by your recruiting and admissions marketing efforts. And those who do enter the funnel and opt to self-disclose are interested in establishing a relationship immediately.

Significantly, this group of prospective students tends to be discouraged by mass communication efforts. We can attribute this phenomenon to numerous factors: the proliferation of media, a growing distrust in marketing messages, and the emergence of new digital technologies that students can control. As a result, fewer students are willing to be passively “processed” through the enrollment funnel. Specific factors challenging the traditional view of the enrollment funnel include:

Fewer Inquiries, But More Applications

- Institutions are reporting increasing numbers of students appearing in the funnel for the first time as applicants, not as inquiries. With easier options for the submission of enrollment applications, application consortia², and pre-printed and personalized application forms mailed to student prospects, projecting enrollment is becoming progressively more difficult.

Ineffective Transactional Communications

- As a result of students entering the funnel at different stage gates, communication and recruitment efforts initiated by status

² For example, The Common Application membership association provides a common, standardized first-year application form for use at over 300 member institutions.

changes lose their effectiveness. Because they do not follow a single, institutionally-prescribed path to enrollment, students are not exposed to key messaging delivered at prescribed stages.

An Inability to Find the Adult Learner

- Adult or continuing learners form the largest segment of potential students in the market. That said, they are not easily targeted. This population has decision time frames that bracket the traditional student population (i.e. the adult learner tends to have a decision time frame that can be either longer or shorter than younger students). In addition, this population is difficult, if not impossible, to target through traditional means such as data purchases or college fairs.

...but, Recruiting and Admissions Approaches Have Not Adapted

Despite these well documented realities, it is common to find outdated recruiting and admissions planning processes a mile wide in their response generation activities, but only an inch deep in their ability to cultivate relationships. This rote application of legacy tactics is resulting in predictable diminishing returns. By focusing solely on loading the funnel and implementing lock-step communication flows as a means of building consideration and commitment, institutions are missing key opportunities to engage students at crucial points of influence in the decision cycle.

Realistically, most students are likely to visit a campus virtually and conduct their research online somewhat autonomously; they are much less likely to be influenced by broadcast communications. Does this mean colleges and universities should just focus on the website and hope for the best? Not at all. In fact, driven by the emergence of popularized interactive media, innovators in colleges and universities are trying numerous approaches-- from blogs to online video to podcasts. Unfortunately, these efforts are often executed without a plan in place to evaluate their impact. As a result, much innovative effort, energy, and expense may well be spent on entertaining, but ineffective, ideas.

The 21st century student multitasks across communication channels, seeks information voraciously, and has the expectation of immediate, customized responses. To be successful with this



student, your enrollment path must be reconceived from a “quantity is king” transactional model, to a series of personalized experiences that offer genuine value. The key to success is to be found in advancing and interweaving the relationship building process across both online and offline channels.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING REMAINS A FUNDAMENTAL COMPETENCY

Despite market shifts, behavioral changes, and innovations in technology, one fundamental truth remains: relationships still matter. The mission of colleges and universities is to support student learning and foster student success. Enrollment results are ultimately driven by an institution’s ability to convey that mission in a personalized and compelling way, articulating the value of its offerings firmly within the context of a student’s desires and motivations. Students are seeking authentic experiences, not information parceled out by professionals. In the absence of that experience, the decision to attend a particular college is, more often than not, reduced to deal-making in the financial aid process.

Will a simple renewed commitment to student relationships result in a sea change for your institution? That remains to be seen. While a relationship focus is hardly a miracle cure or a panacea, treating it as a competence that is critical, will be vital to competing in a complex, multi-channel world. Connecting with

students in a personal way must be an underlying institutional value before supporting technologies or new ways of communicating can make a difference. Technology is only a tool. Alone it cannot create a relationship. However, in the hands of a skilled professional with a well-designed plan, technology offers significant opportunities.

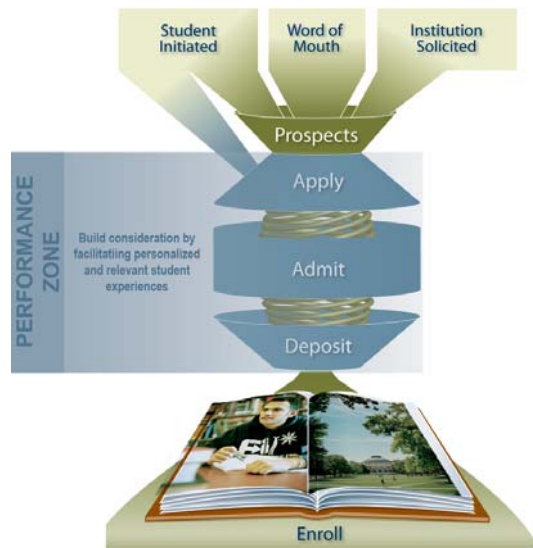


Figure 3

Re-envisioning the Enrollment Funnel

Given the changes in patterns of enrollment, and the impact of more technologically sophisticated student populations, SunGard Higher Education advocates a new model for the enrollment funnel (see figure 3). In this model, institutions rebalance their resources. Rather than focusing on demand generation activities that merely build awareness at the top funnel, this model calls for directing resources to build consideration levels among students who apply for admission or who express interest through online and/or offline behavior. In this “Performance Zone,” your impact on relationship development can be the truly effective.

In this model, enrollment management professionals use online and offline student behavior to more effectively target and personalize their efforts to smaller, more carefully identified audiences. By intentionally planning for and measuring the interactions between a student and your institution, you can gain a dynamic view of the student as he or she moves closer to making an educational choice.

With powerful technologies that help enrollment professionals understand interactions and behavior,

they can quickly identify and pursue targeted student segments. With appropriate tracking and metrics in place, they can identify sequences of interactions to maximize response levels. This insight allows institutions to develop compelling offers – that can be easily tested and validated – while simultaneously connecting more effectively with students.

CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS, STARTS WITH ENROLLMENT PLANNING AND STRATEGY

Enrollment professionals working to transform their planning efforts are quickly abandoning their reliance on historical precedence, or worse, on their “gut,” and adopting a more strategic approach to recruiting and admissions planning that:

- Links enrollment strategy to institutional mission and enrollment-drivers
- Provides a mechanism to align people and processes to deliver and sustain recruiting and admissions performance
- Uses performance data as evidence to substantiate or to modify recruiting and admission activities
- Leverages technology in support of key activities



Start with the End-Game in Mind

As with many most important endeavors, achieving your enrollment goals depends on knowing which road to take. Without a map, it’s easy to take a wrong turn along the way or start out in the wrong direction

altogether. Knowing where to start, and where you hope to end up, is fundamental to a successful trip. In enrollment management, plotting a strategic path can save you missed turns and missed opportunities. In today's multi-channel world, successful efforts cannot be left to chance, but require thoughtful, evidence-based planning.

Of course, no one disagrees that planning is integral to enrollment management. And no one who values a career would announce in a meeting that enrollment direction for the next five years will be based on chance. That said, the more familiar proclamations we hear in enrollment management to "increase quality" or "expand diversity" are equally meaningless without corresponding definitions and appropriate metrics. In contrast, clear goals, accompanied by measurable enrollment objectives and carefully considered tactical plans, are imperative for institutions engaging – or planning to engage – in competitive recruiting and



admissions. Planning, articulating, and documenting an enrollment strategy are essential steps in creating successful strategic plans. And disciplined effort is key. In Thomas Edison's words, "Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration."

Unfortunately, many see technology as a shortcut that can somehow alter that ratio. But technology is not a magic solution, just a new toolset. And when powerful technology is implemented without understanding or acknowledging that it can only be as effective as the processes and people supporting it, organizations often experience the painful magnification of problems that have always existed. This has been validated consistently in the corporate world, where the litany of failed technology efforts to leverage customer relationships into long-term competitive advantage is legion.³ While higher education works differently from most other industries, the underlying dynamics are

consistent. Poor processes result in poor outcomes, no matter what the toolset.

Does this mean technology should be avoided? Certainly not. When organizations acknowledge that it takes more than technology to succeed, outcomes are typically positive. The additional factors they consider include: establishing a business strategy with clear goals and measurable outcomes, securing executive support, aligning people and processes to established goals and objectives, and committing to staff involvement and training. Organizations that commit to these principles position themselves to achieve. In short, a clearly articulated strategy must be in place before technology can matter. Managing prospective student relationships is a strategy first, and a solution second.⁴

Align People and Processes to Deliver Performance

Managing prospective student interactions across any institution can be complicated. Consider the simple example of the various touch points a prospective student may encounter during the enrollment process. The admissions office nurtures the relationship through student application. The financial aid office processes student aid paperwork and awards funding. The housing office requires an application for on-campus housing and makes assignments. The student services office invites students and their families to campus for an orientation and preparation for class enrollment. In effect, each functional office "owns" the student at various points in the process. Yet for the student, with offices competing for attention, the end result may be a disjointed and uncoordinated experience.

From the student's perspective, each of those offices is simply "the institution." Considering this perspective is important to effective recruiting and admissions activities, but all too often overlooked. For many institutions, improving enrollment management strategies will require identifying and even redefining how you interact with your students. Ideally, roles and responsibilities will be aligned to the student experience so that business practices will support those developing relationships effectively.

³ Interested readers will find many articles by searching for "CRM failures," but a good quick read is available in IT Toolbox Research. Boardman, Richard. (2004). Doomed from the start? Why 90% of CRM implementations fail to achieve their potential. <http://hosteddocs.ittoolbox.com/RB121004.pdf>

⁴ Engelbert, Nicole. (2007). AACRAO Tech 2007 Conference. Datamonitor, PLC.

Evidenced-based Recruiting and Admissions Planning

By using data and trend analyses, enrollment professionals can evaluate and substantiate the recruiting and admissions strategies they employ. By planning to measure performance, institutions may execute smaller, yet more effectively targeted campaigns, based on how students actually engage with the institution through online behavior and offline response versus simply selecting which tactics to employ.

Just as a pilot monitors many instrument settings to keep the plane aloft, colleges and universities can utilize gauges--dashboards and scorecards--to monitor recruiting and admissions performance and effectiveness. An enrollment dashboard is a collection of performance indicators that represent point-in-time measurements valued by the institution. The scorecard presents assessment measures in the context of enrollment strategy--the expected outcomes versus actual results.

By synthesizing student information, colleges and universities can analyze trends, model predictive behavior, and use the resulting insight to build stronger student consideration and enrollment commitment, not just design the next campaign. An important question in enabling this capability is determining the data and metrics to track. More often than not, the answer depends on specific institutional strategic enrollment objectives and other unique factors. Developing a clear understanding and resulting data plan is an imperative as measurement for the sake of collecting data might only serve to leave you well-informed on a flight path to nowhere.

Leverage Technology

Technology, used correctly, can be powerful. When aligned to the goals of a well-crafted enrollment strategy, skilled professionals will be able to use technology to deliver carefully designed and compelling experiences that engage students not merely in a campaign, but in a relationship.

In combination with existing systems that manage student information and financial aid, new enrollment management technologies present the opportunity to significantly enrich available information and expand the existing data set. This provides increasingly useful insight into the relationships that are developed and maintained across the institution and the student lifecycle. This rich data, when coupled with

appropriate analytics offers potential to improve enrollment performance in targeted, measurable ways. Ultimately, such an approach allows professionals in the institution to evaluate and track the most valuable asset they possess, their relationships to prospects, students, and graduates.

Today's sophisticated contact, communication, campaign, event, and performance management technologies help those in colleges and universities deliver personalized interactions. At the same time, these technologies allow for the management of larger and more diverse prospect and applicant pools as well as timelier and more highly targeted communications. Combined, the potential to improve the productivity of recruiting and admissions teams is dramatic. Rather than focusing on administrative tasks and repetitive functions to assess enrollment performance, enrollment managers and teams making effective use of current technologies are freed to design and develop experiences that engage students and key constituents, building better relationships.



Given the technical sophistication of most professionals in higher education, and the experience over the last decade of employing data systems on college campuses, installing new technology to support this kind of targeted and engaged relationship building should be simple, right? But of course, it isn't. Institutions are often unable to deliver the benefits and potential that enrollment management technology can provide.

Why would this be true? Often, institutions lack the layered expertise needed to maximize technology potential. Enrollment management professionals know their area in depth, but they are not generally

deeply skilled in technology. Likewise, most campus technology professionals have a somewhat limited view into the complexities of enrollment management. These islands of expertise all too frequently create an unbridgeable gulf between the potential that exists in the toolset an institution has on hand and the way it is actually used by the enrollment management staff.

To maximize the potential of technology and leverage the investment the university has made in its people and processes, a commitment to wise governance is critical.

SUCCEEDING IN A CHALLENGING ENROLLMENT ENVIRONMENT

Building and maintaining student and constituent relationships should be an important institutional value for colleges and universities seeking an advantage in today's competitive and increasingly complex environment. Improved performance goes hand-in-hand with engaging in a student-centric recruiting and admissions approach. In order to connect with the 21st century student, enrollment professionals must:

- Have a clear recruiting and admissions strategy
- Engage in data-based planning
- Monitor and adapt plans throughout the enrollment cycle
- Leverage enrollment management technology to deliver benefits

Today's enrollment management environment presents significant potential accompanied by new challenges and potential risks. To ensure success, enrollment management professionals will need a clearly documented and measurable strategy that is supported by the institution's people and processes. Once these components are in place, an institution is well positioned to take advantage of the powerful tools today's enrollment management technology provides.

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As a member of SunGard Higher Education's Strategic Consulting team, Tim Copeland assists colleges and universities in developing and implementing enrollment management strategy and practices.

Copeland's experience spans higher education enrollment management and corporate marketing. Prior to joining SunGard Higher Education, Tim served as director of enrollment marketing and conference sales for Georgia Tech's Distance Learning and Professional Education unit. He was formerly vice-president of marketing for an international technology company and served as director of admissions at two institutions. He began his career in student services working with recruitment programs and new student orientation.

Tim has spoken nationally to business groups, associations, and universities on topics such as enrollment management and marketing, interactive media and online marketing, and design and innovation.

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