COVID-19: ADMISSIONS
BRINGING IN THE NEW CLASS (of 2020, *and* 2021)

Regardless of college or university's market position, the impact of COVID-19 on new student recruitment has been significant. For most traditional institutions, the campus visit prior to May 1 is the anchor of yield season. For others, late spring and summer application events drive fall enrollments. Without these key, in-person events, colleges and universities have been forced to find new and creative ways to convey the culture of their unique institution in a virtual environment, broadcast from locations off campus. With the possibility that the events of this spring may be repeated next year, but also because some of these novel practices will prove to be effective even in "normal" circumstances, Admissions offices are now thinking through how to convey the transformative power of the on-campus educational experience without face-to-face meetings, tours of campus, sitting in on a class, or lunch in the dining hall with current students. Despite the anticipated return to campuses, there will be lasting and material impacts to the way in which institutions market, engage, and yield new students.

We think about the practice of recruitment this year and next in terms of immediate, medium-term, and longer-term opportunities, defined here as "Triage, Stabilize, and Transform."

TRIAGE	STABILIZE	TRANSFORM
Rapid response to urgent pandemic-related needs	*Shift resources to mid-term stabilization*	*Implement change to ensure long-term success*
• Shift, and plan to continue, student engagement in a virtual environment	• Identify and strengthen your institution's Value Proposition. • Adapt Enrollment Policies and Processes to accommodate a student's more restricted options this year.	• Create a custom, student-centric enrollment experience. • Adopt or optimize your Admissions CRM to measure student interest in new ways. • Streamline the enrollment process for all students.

Triage: Maintain Momentum

Adapting recruitment strategies and tactics in higher education is an annual tradition: Standing still was never an option. However, no Admissions office was prepared for the sudden and significant impact COVID-19 has had on the way prospective and admitted students are now engaged. Within a matter of weeks, college and university Admissions offices were forced to move individual and group visit events online. As a result, it is commonplace to see remote options for virtual information sessions, one-on-one meetings with Admissions representatives, and live streaming of admitted student events.

While hosting these opportunities is an important first step, the need to personalize the student experience remains critical in this competitive environment. Consider these approaches.:

- Allow for customization in virtual meeting requests. The campus visit experience is the most significant way to convey the uniqueness of your institution. During time together by phone or webinar, Admissions needs to convey the culture, traditions, and values of the campus community. The effort put into this "virtual" experience also conveys the level of effort your institution puts into the students' educational experience.
- Work closely with academic departments, student life, and athletics to provide students with a complete picture of what life is like at your institution and to address how they are adapting to a post COVID-19 environment.
- Follow up personally with attendees after the virtual event. This demonstrates your interest in them, helps you measure the impact of your event, and informs your approach to future events.

HURON

- Build virtual content beyond individual and group visit events. Develop videos hosted by current students, faculty, staff, and alumni that speak to their unique experiences and pride in the institution. The institution's website is the primary source of information for prospective students.

Continuing these strategies throughout the summer will be critical, this year more than most, in preventing unusual summer melt. Finally, keep metrics on attendance and effectiveness – many online practices will likely be continued going forward as supplements to future in-person offerings.

Stabilize: Seize Opportunity

Even before COVID-19 upended the student recruitment cycle, policy changes adopted by NACAC in 2019 meant institutions would be spending summer combating melt, building affinity, and creating enthusiasm for the upcoming academic year. With the absence of on-campus orientations and the potential for remote offering of fall classes, Admissions will need to work closely with Marketing, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs, to build out robust content that conveys a strong sense of community, facilitates cohort building, and defines the value of the enrolled student experience. Financial Aid options for students in the COVID-19 environment are ever changing and plans for fall instruction will be defined shortly. Building community within the incoming class will occur as new students engage in frequent and transparent on these important topics.

Authenticity is essential even in these uncertain times. Attempting to portray an experience that is tone deaf to the stress of the times will come across as insincere and will represent a missed opportunity to demonstrate the true spirit of your institution. Coordinate a social media campaign with campus partners (student life, activities, intramurals, and athletics) to present the entirety of student life. Be sure to articulate how this experience has brought the community closer together. Seize the opportunity to showcase creative approaches to high-impact experiences (e.g., research, internships, community service).

In addition to reimaging student engagement, institutions need to assess and optimize academic policies and business processes related to first-time and transfer student enrollments; the impact of on-campus closures will be felt into the next recruitment cycle. As Admissions professionals turn to the next application season, here are some things to consider:

- With nationwide standardized test dates being canceled, institutions need to rethink how these tests factor into their admission policies. Admissions offices will need to consider adopting new application requirements such as a personal statement and letters of recommendation.
- In response to high schools and community colleges moving to online platforms, institutions have begun to adapt their transfer credit policies to acknowledge pass/fail grading and remote AP testing, so that students are not disadvantaged by factors outside of their control.
- Admission and scholarship committees will also need to think through how they will assess the lack of co-curricular activity, employment, leadership positions, honors, and awards as they asses an applicant's commitment to service and potential to make an impact at the institution.
- It will be important to assess the preparation of the class yielded under these new circumstances. New approaches to admissions should be evaluated -- and *continued* where they maintain quality while providing a simpler or more flexible application experience.

Transform: Reimagine the Enrollment Experience

One positive outcome of all this is that it has forced institutions to think differently about how to engage and recruit prospective students. Today's digital natives expect customized consumer experiences that deliver the information they want, when they want it. In response, higher education's admissions process will need to create a student-centric, custom enrollment experience, based on the specific needs and expectations of each student, regardless of where they are in the enrollment process and the device that they are using to conduct their college search. A fully leveraged CRM with Artificial Intelligence capabilities, integrated with an optimized institutional website, is the essential building block to providing prospective students with a fully customized enrollment experience. In order to accomplish this, institutions must:

- Create personas for each target student segment, including their specific decision timelines, institutional attributes, potential decision barriers, and education goals.
- Map the student recruitment experience and identify the specific call-to-action and key influencer(s) for each stage of the enrollment funnel.

- Provide self-service options through the institutional website, mobile app, and student portals so that they control what information is most relevant to them.
- Translate the custom online experience to students' on-campus experiences.

The collection and on-going analysis of the information provided by prospective students will provide enrollment managers with the ability to gauge the strength of each student pipeline, drive students to action at key decision milestones, and better predict enrollment outcomes.

The current crisis also provides institutions with the opportunity to permanently address the critical service and process gaps that exist in the student enrollment journey. In today's competitive recruitment environment, simplicity, speed and convenience in the recruitment process yield positive results. As institutions look to expand to new markets and serve an increasingly diverse array of students, internal business processes must be redesigned with the student perspective at the forefront.

Authored by: Steve Hahn and Steven Schuetz

Access other educational resources on our COVID-19 resource page. For more information, contact us.