OCTANE™

ACTIONABLE INSIGHT & REMARKABLE TOPICS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY enrollmentFUEL

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INSIDE

Letter from Our Vice President of Operations

As Vice President of Operations, it is my job to be a bridge-builder, aligning people, processes, and technology to serve clients and help them achieve goals.

Dear *Octane* Booster,

January marks the mid-way point in the recruiting cycle when operational efficiency matters more than ever because operations keep strategies on track and processes running smoothly.

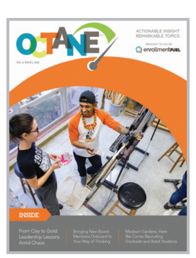
The lessons I learned working in enrollment management serve me well at enrollmentFUEL. As Vice President of Operations, it is my job to be a bridge-builder, aligning people, processes, and technology to serve clients and help them achieve goals. When we developed content for this issue, we focused on ideas to improve operations and the importance of leadership.

In her essay, enrollmentFUEL's president, Dr. Jacquelyn D. Elliott, asks leaders to challenge long-held operational routines to improve outcomes. Training expert Cié Gee, Ed.D., provides you with a series of case studies on people-issues, like burn-out, for team discussion. "Aligning New Board Members to Your Way of Thinking" features five enrollment leaders sharing practical advice for quickly getting new trustees up-to-speed on enrollment issues. We also explore adult and graduate recruiting, along with using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and look-alike modeling to generate leads. And, our final article, "Emailing Unengaged," written by enrollmentFUEL's Vice President of Client Services, Jay Fedje, discusses how your institution's online reputation score impacts the success of email marketing.

At enrollmentFUEL, I serve as a resource for our clients, team, and community. If you would like to trade ideas, share information, or brainstorm, please reach out.

Best wishes for 2021!

Michelle Sundstrom, M.Ed.
Vice President of Operations



enrollmentFUEL would like to extend our gratitude to McMurry University in Abilene, Texas, for allowing this photo to be featured on the cover of our magazine.

***Octane* the Magazine:**
A publication of enrollmentFUEL
A collection of innovative thoughts from a team of people bonded to clients in a way to prevent the knocking that comes with the "one size fits all" Student Search strategies. Adding **Octane** to your thinking fuels creativity and releases positive energy among enrollment professionals.

inside OCTANE™

Thanks
for Helping Us Pay It Forward

Thanks to everyone who participated in enrollmentFUEL's annual "Pay It Forward" holiday giving campaign. Members of the FUEL team selected five charities. This year, they were:

- Heifer International
- Ronald McDonald House Charities
- The Salvation Army
- United Negro College Fund (UNCF)
- USO

When a participant chose a charity, we donated $20.00 to that charity in their honor. Upon selection, a light was placed on the giving map showing the approximate location of the donor.

enrollmentFUEL contributed more than $3,000 from this campaign, and more than $20,000 in total charitable giving this year.

By working together, we make the world a brighter place for all.

See all the locations of participants at PayForward.enrollmentFUEL.com

FROM CLAY TO GOLD:

Leadership Lessons Amid Chaos

By Jacquelyn D. Elliott, Ed.D.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."[1] To me, it seems Charles Dickens described 2020 with this famous quote from *A Tale of Two Cities.* The worst of times is obvious, given the changes COVID has brought upon us, but many would question my reference regarding the best of times.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and often, the best ideas are born from chaos. During the past year, enrollment leaders were tested and forced to re-examine long-held assumptions. As you prepare for spring, I wish to share three leadership ideas to consider. Each idea brings a new way to look at leadership in less than predictable times.

For most of us, routine is our friend. It provides that rhythm that keeps us humming. As Thoreau said, "Routine is a ground to stand on, a wall to retreat to."[2]

1 Retrieved from https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/341391-it-was-the-best-of-times-it-was-the-worst
2 Retrieved from: https://libquotes.com/henry-david-thoreau/quote/lbu6b8k

/01

REPETITION *VS.* ROUTINE

The problem with routine as a leader is that it limits us from exploring new methods, new technology, and innovation. We like our routines, so why change them? Interestingly, routine is often confused with expertise. What I posit here is that as leaders, we need to be more focused on repetition instead of routine not only for ourselves, but for our staff.

As I consult around the country, over and over, the staff tells me they have been trained, but there are often large gaps between the time of training and the time of doing.

When a new admission counselor joins your team, they get soup-to-nuts training early on. It covers everything from travel (yes, we used to travel!) to processing applications to working deposits. Knowledge is passed on, but admission counselors don't have the opportunity to develop muscle memory because all knowledge is not immediately put into practice. The "knowing-doing gap" and Ebbinghaus's forgetting curve[3] point to the severity of the problem: We quickly forget most of what we learn unless we consistently apply it. When leaders have a "train early, train once" routine, and people don't immediately do the tasks in a job, they lose anywhere from 40% to 80% of what they encountered in training.

Here is where repetition comes into play. If we really want our teams to do better, we have to give our staff space to repeat processes until they master them. And, even more importantly, we must also repeat what we have said to ensure our team grasps concepts. When leaders and trainers fall into the trap of thinking, "I already told you how to do X," or saying, "I already showed you that," the staff often picks up on the leader's frustration. The staff folds inward and stops asking for help, jeopardizing the learning process required to do their work—and do it well.

Takeaway? Routine often creates lethargy and lack of innovation, while repetition allows us to hone a skill to be as good as we can possibly be.

Action? Space out training into smaller increments. Let your staff ask questions and practice using knowledge. Then, move to the next small increment you want them to learn. This spring, restart staff training on desired outcomes, so they can meet that expectation.

3 Chun, B.A. & Heo, H.J. The effect of flipped learning on academic performance as an innovative method for overcoming ebbinghaus' forgetting curve ICIET '18: Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Information and Education TechnologyJanuary 2018 Pages 56-60 https://doi.org/10.1145/3178158.3178206

/02

BETTER *VS.* BEST

When I was growing up, I remember my fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Randolph, saying:

> **"Good, better, best,**
> **Never let it rest,**
> **Until your good is better than your best."**

For years, that little expression stuck with me as I tackled tasks, whether it was homework, chores, or practicing for my singing lessons. My best was a place that could always be improved upon with that mindset—a paradox of sorts.

Interestingly, as I took on more leadership positions, that important life lesson slipped away. I always focused on being the best in my department. I wanted my staff to be their best and pushed for that. As I examined the past year, and the many changes it has brought to our work environments, I have paused, gone back to my early roots, and thought about better.

This cycle brings the word "better" into consideration, and in many cases, crumbled practices once considered best. Why? Because when things were stable in an office, and practices were honed, individuals considered them to be the best in that place and time. Then, a new place and time (chaos) hit. Our best processes had to be done away with, replaced by something that was a better fit for a particular moment.

Here is the secret—better is incremental and never finite. If we ask people to do better, it's manageable. It isn't *overwhelming*, it does not create pressure, and it gives people hope because the best is usually the top position or winner, and there is only one.

Better is inclusive of every person on the team. Better is always striving for the next great thing, while best gives a perceived notion of already being at the pinnacle. Best causes people to accept where they are as being perfect, so why keep looking, trying, experimenting, and tinkering? On the other hand, better nudges people, giving them that next incremental push, and never allows us to rest on our laurels.

Takeaway? Asking staff to be the best can negatively impact what we seek in two ways. First, it allows people who think they cannot be the best to give up. And second, it allows staff to perceive when they have reached a certain point, there isn't anything else to achieve.

Better, on the other hand, is inclusive. Everyone can be better, and it allows people to keep pushing in incremental stages (paradoxically achieving the status of best).

Action? This spring, in your one-on-one meetings with staff, ask them what they think can be better in the office. Nothing is off the table, whether it is a process, task, training, meeting structure, operation, policy, etc. Then, assign each person one thing to "make better" and allow them ownership. When they have completed the task, highlight it, and celebrate it openly. Keep moving down the list of things to accomplish that can "be better," and before you know it, morale will increase. When people have a sense of purpose (and something known) in these unusual times, it creates a genuine win for your team.

/03

KNOWING *VS.* DOING

About a decade before I was born, a group of monks in Thailand decided to move a ten-and-a-half foot clay statue of Buddha to a new temple. As they were moving it, the clay cracked, revealing something shiny. A monk chipped away at the crack, revealing a Buddha of solid gold. It is speculated that the earlier monks encapsulated the Buddha to hide it from the Burmese soldiers, thus, hiding the true identity of the Buddha until it was uncovered hundreds of years later.[4]

Leaders sometimes become a clay Buddha as they climb the ladder of success. Deep inside is the gold that promoted them to their leadership position, hidden by the clay of the everyday minutia of endless checklists, meetings, fires, and operational distress, hiding their true leadership identity.

In most leadership theories, the research encourages that *knowing* is not enough, and *doing* is the key to energized leadership, accomplishment, and leading by example. However, I want to flip this concept in the current environment and say that we need to focus as leaders more on the knowing than the doing during the next few months. Why? Because we have staff who can do and implement for days—they are good at it, giving them a sense of accomplishment. What they are looking for in this environment is a leader who knows answers, knows how to problem-solve, and knows when to use emotional intelligence to calm fears of the unknown. Staffers hunger for the contemplative strategist, even when that means being transparent and letting the staff know when the strategy is not clear and explaining what is known at the moment.

4 Retrieved from: https://theculturetrip.com/asia/thailand/articles/the-amazing-story-of-the-worlds-biggest-solid-gold-buddha-statue/

I don't mean to advocate that leaders should think and pontificate for days without taking action. Rather, I believe activity for the sake of activity, and doing in the absence of knowledge, is not the best answer in this current work environment. A thoughtful and present leader is needed more than ever, and your institution counts on you to bring that value to your team.

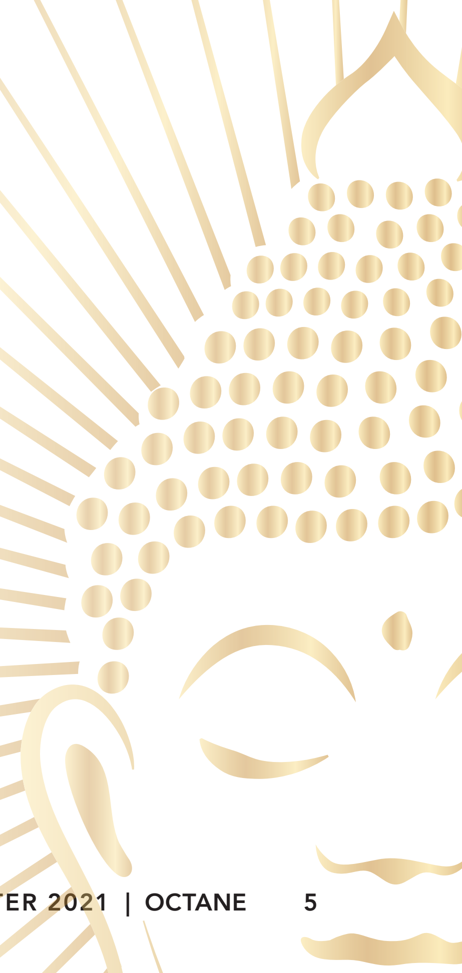
Takeaway? While knowing and doing are essential aspects of leadership, the main focus in leadership theory has been on doing and execution. In this current environment, I challenge leaders to pause, spend more time honing their knowledge of what to do, the actions to be taken by others, and the communication of knowledge to create a sense of calm and stability.

Action? Sit quietly this spring every week for an hour, and list three things you know about your current landscape. In staff meetings, announce those three things. Communicate with confidence. Assign tasks if something needs to be addressed to change the situation. Close the loop every week on the last three things. For example: "I realize students are not attending the virtual visits we have set up, and this is causing great stress for all of us. Sally and John, I want the two of you to meet this week and come back next week with a plan for two new ideas we can implement to connect with students in a meaningful way."

While 2020 threw us all for a loop, there are many lessons we can take from the year to help us examine and flip previous philosophies to better lead our teams in the moment in which we find ourselves. Three such areas include training to reduce the forgetting curve, focusing on being better rather than the best, and being a practitioner of knowledge accumulation and dissemination.

As leaders, we all have inner gold waiting to be found. By implementing the above strategies, you can be a gold Buddha to your staff by helping them better learn and retain for output, push to continually be better, and have a sense of calm in the work they do every day with you at the helm.

Dr. Jacquelyn D. Elliott is President of enrollmentFUEL. By combining training with processes and tactics, she has developed strategies that led multiple campuses to record enrollments. Dr. Elliott speaks and consults nationally on Student Search leadership and professional development and leadership training topics. She can be reached at jacqui.elliott@enrollmentfuel.com.



MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, HERE WE COME: RECRUITING GRADUATE & ADULT STUDENTS

By Lisa Branson, M.Ed.

When it comes to graduate and adult recruitment, there are many moving parts. Unlike the traditional market, success is based less on your brand's perceived value, and more on your marketing budget and advertising spend. This reality can be daunting at smaller schools trying to hold their own in the adult/graduate recruiting space.

What makes graduate and adult recruitment more difficult and sometimes more expensive? To succeed, you need a strategy to recruit by program, instead of at an institutional level. The difficulty and added expenses come from the need to market multiple programs when admission offices are already stressed for resources.

EVALUATING WHERE TO FOCUS EFFORT

When you start down the planning path for graduate and adult recruiting, begin the journey by sorting your institution's programs into three categories:

1. SUCCESSFUL AND GROWING ORGANICALLY

Definition: Enough students find and choose the program to justify its existence without additional investment.

2. SURVIVING WITH PLENTY OF ROOM FOR GROWTH

Definition: These programs cover a significant percentage of their costs, get good reviews by students, offer degrees sought by adult students or graduate students, and are at parity or better than what is offered by competitors.

3. STRUGGLING

Definition: These programs run significant deficits and are below parity or have significant deficiencies compared to other institutions' programs.

When resources are limited, you need to evaluate where to put time and money based on the ***program's potential*** to yield growth. If you try to support too many programs with too little money, it puts you in the danger zone with the risk of achieving nothing.

Opportunity lurks in the second category, defined as "Surviving with plenty of room for growth." Rate each program using a five-point scale:

POOR 1 | BELOW AVERAGE 2 | AVERAGE 3 | ABOVE AVERAGE 4 | EXCELLENT 5

Set up a rubric to evaluate factors such as:

- Market penetration
- Competitive intensity
- Program pricing
- Size of the available market
- Satisfaction of graduates
- The ability of the program to meet the needs of students
- Ease of the application and admittance process
- How well the program is touted and recruited in the marketplace

Add up the ratings to rank the programs. Use this as your starting point for determining resource allocation. Even with a six-figure budget, trying to support every program in this category could be challenging for many institutions, so be prepared to make tough decisions.

WHAT STUDENTS WANT

Along with a degree, graduates and adult learners are looking for other benefits, such as:

- Flexibility
- Minimal barriers to entry
- Time/cost considerations
- Positive career outcomes

These factors need to be communicated on your website and in other communications along with program-related choice points.

Flexibility

Students in adult and graduate programs often work full-time and are responsible for a household. With multiple priorities competing for their time and attention, taking classes on *their* terms is essential, and time to degree completion matters. According to *Dean & Provost*, student retention improves through strong advisement, practical learning, and through cohort programs.[1] School location or the availability of online programs matter. These students are not as mobile as traditional-aged college students. They are bound to a home base location through job and family obligations.

RECRUITING TIP: Digital advertising is a great way to reach adult and graduate populations of students. Social media, especially traditional methods like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, work well for these populations. In ads, emphasize flexibility. Images of students with families resonate with this group. Inform students of programs that are offered online and communicate about flexible options for class scheduling. Personal opportunities for advisement should be emphasized.

Minimize Barriers to Entry

Undergraduate and graduate degree programs have been removing standardized testing requirements, eliminating SAT, ACT, GRE, and GMAT testing. In research conducted by Dr. Jennifer Chicca, she says tests like the GRE must

1 Retrieved from: https://www.pace.edu/sites/default/files/files/news/dean-provost.pdf

7 Smart Tactics to Try

Here are the top seven tactics we have used at enrollmentFUEL to help clients meet adult and graduate recruiting goals.

1. Invest in pay-per-click advertising. It is the fastest way to be found by people looking for programs at an institution like yours.
2. Hire a telecounseling operation. Have them call everyone in your CRM to determine your inquiries' status so you can focus effort where it gets results.
3. Restart communications. Create a list of all past inquiries who are no longer receiving communications. Send an email with current news about programs. Observe who opens the email and does not unsubscribe. Put these leads into a new nurture campaign.
4. Improve program copy on your website. Does it focus on benefits? Is it persuasive? Does it support your organic SEO efforts so your programs can be found by potential students?
5. Collect and publish success stories. Make it a point to follow up with past graduates to gather stories about career and personal success. Publish them on the website and your social channels, like LinkedIn.
6. Identify first-time website visitors, and send them a postcard. With matchBACK™ code from enrollmentFUEL, you can collect stealth visitors' home addresses, send a follow-up postcard, and direct them to take the next step.
7. Remarket with a splash page. Use digital ads to encourage website visitors to make a return visit and take the next step. Direct visitors to a splash page. Consider adopting a "give to get" strategy, where inquiries give you complete contact information to get something of value, like a useful brochure titled, "Affordable Graduate Program Options."

be examined for "appropriate use and necessity."[2] Standardized tests are time-consuming and represent significant investments for students, both mentally and financially. A growing population of adult and graduate students regard testing as a barrier they are not interested in overcoming. Another factor to consider is application fees.

If you require tests or require fees, it may be time to reconsider if your competitors do not have these obstacles in place. Make it easy for students to apply, such as providing online applications with no log-ins. Fast communications about application status will encourage applications and generally leads to a higher completion level. Providing clear and concise information on your website about the application process is helpful to students and increases the likelihood they will act.

RECRUITING TIP: For adult and graduate recruiting, using tools like FUEL's inquiryDETECTOR™, where new website visitors can be identified and tracked, is the key to your institution's success. Build program-specific landing pages and communications. Design easy-to-navigate pages. Indicate what you want students to do, and place calls to action above the fold.

Time/Cost Considerations

Adult and graduate students are very sensitive to issues of price and time to degree completion. To move forward, potential students must understand how much the degree will cost and the types of financial aid available.

RECRUITING TIP: Be transparent with prospective students. Inform them about scholarships and financial aid as early as possible, even before they apply. Don't be afraid to invest money in mailings about scholarships—direct mail has an impact.

Career Outcomes

Strong outcomes messages and communicating about the available resources for career development and locating jobs will strengthen your competitive position with adult and graduate students.

RECRUITING TIP: Consider developing an influencer campaign using your alumni and current students, giving them a platform to share personal stories about career success. Influencer campaigns work well on social platforms. Outcomes messaging also works well in pay-per-click advertising campaigns.

2 Chicca, Jennifer. "Analyzing Use of the Graduate Record Examinations® General Test in Doctoral Nursing Education: Start, Stop, Continue, or Modify?" Nursing Education Perspectives, 1/2 2020 - Volume 41, Issue 1: PP 26-29.

IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL IT'S OVER!

Unlike traditional undergraduate recruiting, there is no natural starting point or default threshold for pursuing degrees by adults and graduates. Adult and graduate recruiting requires a "punch-to-the-bell" philosophy. Recruiting an adult or graduate student only stops when the prospect asks to be removed from the system – not when their expected term passes without them enrolling. The school's CRM, communication plan, and recruiters should keep punching out touches until a lead says stop, causing the bell to ring. This differs from traditional recruitment, where clear endpoints dictate when communication with the student should cease.

Another group to nurture is your undergraduate alumni base. With easy-to-find contact information, this group has already built a strong relationship with your institution. Eventually, some will pursue graduate degrees, so don't ignore the "low-hanging fruit" when recruiting.

enrollmentFUEL often recommends two leading tactics for adult and graduate recruiting. First is program-specific pay-per-click (PPC) ads. When a potential student is searching for a specific program at a school like yours, PPC ads create awareness at the top of the funnel. Second, work with your social marketing team to build a strong presence on LinkedIn for your institution. As consultant and author Bobby Darnell says, "Active participation on LinkedIn is the best way to say, 'Look at me!' without saying 'Look at me!'"[3] And, when you are recruiting adults and graduates, you want to get all the looks you can.

Personally, it took me several years to decide to apply to a doctoral program and then attend. I had many life factors at play that determined the timing and, ultimately, the stamina to balance work and academics simultaneously. Once a term passes without a lead enrolling, place potential students in a non-responder communications flow, and continue to market. Many students will behave as I did when seeking graduate school. Don't go to your corner too soon. Just like the winners at Madison Gardens, it's important to keep on swinging until that bell finally rings.

3 Retrieved from: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/linkedin

Lisa Branson, M.Ed., is the Vice President of Enrollment Systems, and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. She is an expert in adult and graduate recruiting, financial aid, and all aspects of Student Search, including digital advertising. Lisa has run many pay-per-click advertising programs for adult and graduate programs, and she is always happy to share her experiences with enrollment professionals. If you would like to know more, Lisa can be reached at lisa.branson@enrollmentfuel.com.

MINI-CASE STUDIES

Just Right for 2021

By Cié Gee, Ed.D.

No one can dispute what an unpredictable, ambiguous, and upside-down year 2020 was. You may be reading this from your home office, your campus office, or some other hybrid situation. 2020 has forced us to change our habits and rituals and look at the world and our jobs differently. Pandemic fatigue is real, and taking time to train your team around some of the past year's challenges will help you enter the new year and next cycle prepared for whatever may come.

To find clarity in all the gray ambiguity, here are five reality-based case studies to start conversations with your team.

CASE STUDY #1

Being Okay with "I Don't Know."

Monique leads a large team at Up&Coming University. The week of March 20, 2020, her university sent everyone home to work remotely with no mention of a return to campus date. Every week she got questions from her staff:

"When are we going back?"

"How do I get my campus mail?"

"Are layoffs coming?"

"Are we having budget cuts?"

"Is my job still the same?"

"What does Fall 2020 look like?"

"Will we have in-person classes?"

"What do we tell students, parents?"

"Is my on-campus office going away?"

"Am I going to be fired?"

For some time, all Monique could say was, "I don't know." Morale declined as the weight of institutional ambiguity compounded the crippling effects of the pandemic and dire talks of low enrollment.

How can Monique keep the lines of communication open when information is limited and ever-changing?

Facilitating Learning: We are all faced with situations in which we don't know the answer, but I argue many of us have experienced a considerable increase in "I don't know" responses this year. The dark abyss of "I don't know" can be intimidating, frustrating, and create feelings of inadequacy, especially if you are the team leader. The situation becomes more ominous when people fill in the blanks themselves with wrong information. To quote C. Northcote Parkinson, *"Remember, the vacuum created by the failure to communicate is soon filled with poison, drivel, and misrepresentation."*[1]

Even when the answer is "I don't know," the conversation shouldn't just end there. There are lessons to be learned in embracing and accepting that sometimes "I don't know" results in times of rapid change, limited information, or information gaps. When that is the case, "I don't know" should be given with confidence furthering conversation, instead of guilt or fear.

By creating an environment of discovery and welcoming questions and inquiry, you build a safe place for staff to ask the questions needed to clarify unknown situations.

This case study helps your staff explore the birthplace and implications of "I don't know" from five different perspectives.

1 Curtin, T., Hayman, D., & Husein, N. Managing a Crisis (London, UK: Palgrave Macmilla, 2005), PP. 50-63.

THE CASE FOR CASE STUDIES

Story-based case studies add realism, increase interest, and promote practical learning. They are a non-threatening way for your team to discover new concepts.

Case studies allow learners to build on past experiences and reach new conclusions. They facilitate discussion, creating a safe venue where someone can change their minds about a situation.

Best of all, the case study method does not put people in the awkward position of having to defend past decisions or practices.

We hope you find value in the case studies created by training expert, Cié Gee, Ed.D.

To download individual case studies for team training, please go to enrollmentfuel.com/octane-case-studies

Explore Stress

As stress levels increase, we lose our ability to think clearly and rationalize. Changes in staff, resources, even the location of work (home vs. office) creates stress. Add global issues such as pandemics, natural disasters, civil unrest, political turmoil, and everyday personal struggles, and you have a boiling pot of anxiety. Exploring these with staff will make stressors visible and help minimize conclusion-jumping.

Explain the allocation of limited resources

If resources are cut, do your staff members know how to shift focus and priorities? Please do not take for granted they do. Have a clear conversation about what is available right now, and how they will use what they have to move forward.

Discuss role ambiguity or role incompatibility

Even a change like working remotely from home can feel like a shift in job duties. And most likely, staff members have had at least some shift of responsibility since online adaptation had to be managed. Have open conversations, praise the work and effort that has been displayed, and make sure everyone is on the same page about their daily tasks.

Missing (wrong) information

Quash rumors as soon as they surface. Call unfounded scuttlebutt by its name. "That is a rumor that does not have evidence to prove it is a fact. Please do not spread rumors."

Manage emotions

Feelings are real, and it is alright to feel things. There is no way the emotional toll of 2020 hasn't leaked into our jobs. Create a space for sharing and listening to staff.

Now that you have identified and explored breeding grounds for "I don't know," brainstorm and explore ways to say it differently. One caveat; the suggestions below can be perceived as skirting the question that was asked, but I am suggesting that these possible answers open the door for further discussion. These suggestions are not meant to be a shut-down.

- I don't have enough information to answer your question now, but this is what I do know.
- That is a developing situation, and more research is needed before I can give an accurate answer. Let's brainstorm possible research.
- That is a very valid question and one that I'm seeking an answer for as well. Have you looked into this question?
- Let's review what we do know.
- Based on the facts that we have in front of us, we can determine the following is true.
- Looking at national trends, and what some of our benchmark institutions are doing, we can hypothesis the following.
- Based on the knowledge I have right now (or based on my current understanding), I can confirm the following.
- Let's discuss what we know and what we don't know.

Accepting that you don't know can be hard when your staff is pushing for concrete answers.

However, from my experience, the act of having a conversation creates transparency and acceptance in a developing situation.

CASE STUDY #2

Am I on Mute?

This situation comes from my personal experience (and I hope you smile at my story). Early on in the onslaught of online meetings, I entered a Zoom meeting upside down – literally! At the time, I didn't know how it happened, and I became flustered as the other meeting participants commented on my inverted appearance. Worse yet, this was one of 'those' meetings, with important people where I wanted to give an air of professionalism. After several minutes of futile attempts to right myself, I admitted defeat and turned off my camera.

Now I'm a Zoom expert and understand the mistake, but I learned a lesson from that meeting: Take time to learn the new platform in a safe space.

When we are always in meetings, when can we learn a new platform?

Facilitating Learning: You may think this is not needed now since we have all been meeting online for months. However, I still encounter presenters who do not know how to share their screen, use the chat, or even create a meeting on their own.

Set up an exploration meeting. Play around with your platform as part of the discussion. It is also a great way to highlight the expertise of members of your team. Most likely, there is one who is very skilled in Zoom or Microsoft teams. If not, this could be a project that supports socializing and fun, along with team building.

CASE STUDY #3

Recognizing Burnout

Rebecca has been a college recruiter for five years. Her work is always top-notch, and she is very reliable. Over the past few months, her work quality has declined, and she has missed some deadlines. Last week, her supervisor asked Rebecca to complete a brief territory information report for an important meeting. Rebecca has produced the same report in the past, but this time, she got micro-focused on the report's style and format and stuck in analysis paralysis. Instead of taking a day, it took Rebecca a week to complete. When Rebecca's supervisor reprimanded Rebecca for lateness, for the first time, Rebecca shared that her husband had been laid off. To help financially, Rebecca had taken an extra part-time job and was dealing with other family stressors.

How can Rebecca's supervisor improve efforts to recognize burnout?

Facilitating Learning: According to the Mayo Clinic, job burnout is a state of exhaustion, physical or emotional, that also involves a deficit in normal work accomplishments.[2] Most times, it isn't the 'job' that is burning people out, but other stressors they are carrying. The following are questions to explore with your team to identify job burnout. **Note**: For privacy reasons, these don't have to be discussed in the open, but private reflection can help people navigate.

- How has this change affected you physically or emotionally?
- What work/life balance issues are you now dealing with?
- What part of work/life balance are you enjoying? What part is causing a lot of stress?
- Are you feeling guilty about not working enough?
- Do you understand your job role?
- Do you find that you have a lack of energy when working? When does this occur? Morning, afternoon, on Mondays?
- Are you short-tempered with staff?
- Do you understand what your supervisor expects from you?
- Do you feel like you can talk to your supervisor about their expectations?
- Do you feel like you are working all the time? Or, have you established clear boundaries between work and life?

Share practical coping solutions. Discuss how staff members can open the lines of communication with their supervisors and explore compromises. Talk about setting manageable, short-term goals, so people have identifiable wins. Let people know it is okay to reach out to someone – a coworker, friends, or an employee assistance program. Share relaxation activities, articles on dealing with stress, and other resources with your team.

As a leader of the team, be diligent when watching for early signs of burnout. Reassure your team of the excellent work they are doing and reinforce accomplishments often.

2 Retrieved from: https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642

CASE STUDY #4

When Things Get Back to Normal

Kevin has worked in the Admissions Office at Stuck-in-a-Rut University for 30 years.The recent changes have been difficult for Kevin. The closing of his campus for several months resulted in all staff working from home. It accelerated technology like web-based meeting platforms, and digital paperwork flows, and necessitated online meetings with students.

Kevin speaks about these changes as temporary, continually using the phrase "when things go back to normal." Though several of the changes have benefited the office overall, he is resistant to apply new techniques or tweak his job functions in any way that violates his 'back to normal' ideal.

How do you help Kevin understand that some changes are permanent?

Facilitating Learning: If you haven't already, STOP using the phrase 'when things go back to normal.' First, what is *normal* anyway? The dictionary defines 'normal' as "the usual, average or typical state."[3] Synonyms of the word are *predictable* and *unexceptional*. Okay, let's unpack that.

At institutions, we are all in competition to be the stand-out for whoever our student population is. Why do we want to be predictable and unexceptional? Yes, the pandemic has created major upheaval, and no, not all of it has been good. But we must take the growth mindset of looking for the positives, the gains, and saying, "I can't wait to see where these new changes will take us."

When people say, "*go back to normal*," they long for predictable states with average outcomes where all is known and comfortable. But there is danger in this static thinking. It often fails to recognize innovation. Learning new technology, discovering new ways of interacting with students, exploring new ways to lead your team, creating more efficient routing processes, and reducing paperwork are all positive aspects of innovation in recent times. Celebrate these wins with an "innovative practices show and tell."

This discussion also provides an opportunity to explore where blind loyalty lies. What are the 'we've always done it that way' beliefs that your staff still clings to?

Here are questions for guided discussion:

- Discuss some of the hardest changes/innovative practices (for you personally) that have happened this year. What similarities did you find? What differences?
- What were the old ways of thinking, resistance issues, and changes in behavior that occurred?
- Was your specific change example handled well? Why or why not? Did this impact how you dealt with change?
- How did the people around you perceive the change?
- Thinking of something representative of a major change, what evidence do you have that it was handled effectively/ineffectively?
- What makes change hard?
- What do we know that is still predictable and creates some normalcy as we move forward?

This discussion helps your staff draw on other life experiences and recognize that while everything in the office can't return to the way it was in 2019, they will be okay.

3 Retrieved from: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/normal

CASE STUDY #5

Leaning into the Discomfort of Discussing Privilege and Bias

Julie is an administrative assistant who has worked for the college for ten years. She is upbeat, friendly, and plays a critical support role in the office. Julie is African American, while the majority of her coworkers are White. The increase in violence against Black citizens has taken an emotional toll on Julie and her family. She has taken several days of vacation and is struggling to maintain her cheerful attitude.

Frank is a coworker of Julie's; he is White. Frank has also been shocked by the violence and felt the urge to ask Julie how she is doing or say something, but he is unsure how to approach the subject.

Having discussions with your team about racial violence, bias, and privilege is important, but these conversations often don't occur for various reasons. Most colleges and universities have a Diversity and Inclusion office that can either facilitate the discussion or direct you to resource materials.

The need to talk through difficult issues goes beyond your team, extending to the students you serve. If staff members are feeling emotional effects, students are also experiencing them. And, I would also argue that you can't address this topic with one conversation. Instead, plan for a series of exchanges exploring how your staff can be anti-racist activists and support colleagues and students of color. Talk through current practices, making sure they are advocacy-oriented and equity-minded.

Moving Forward

Plans for the 2020-2021 enrollment cycle blew up in March 2020. Teams have been separated either mentally or physically from each other. Stress and burnout are common byproducts of rapid, unexpected change. Before moving forward, it is critical to pause and reflect on challenges and accomplishments. Using a case study as a discussion vehicle allows people to discover new ideas and uncovers your team's achievements, both large and small.

Ginnifer Cié Gee, Ed.D. is the Director of Strategic Planning and Assessment for Enrollment at the University of Texas San Antonio, and an expert in professional workplace dynamics and communication, including nonverbal, perceptions, leadership, etiquette, and conflict. She has over a decade of experience in enrollment management and has presented over 50 sessions on a wide range of topics at state, regional, and national levels, receiving many awards for her presentation skills. Contact Cié at Ginnifer.Gee@utsa.edu.

Aligning New Board Members to *Your Way* of Thinking

By Linda Bishop, MBA

Even before the upheavals caused by the global pandemic, college and university boards have experienced increasing pressure and scrutiny at both private and public institutions. In a 2015 PBS article titled, "Once Invisible, College Boards of Trustees Push into the Spotlight," they reported, "Populated largely by wealthy alumni and political appointees, university and college boards of regents and trustees have historically operated largely out of sight. But as tuition escalates, along with questions about what students and their families get for their money, boards are finding themselves in an unaccustomed spotlight — or are taking matters into their own hands."[1]

> ***Our current landscape, both nationally and globally, has ratcheted up the pressure on institutional boards everywhere. Crisis response has replaced strategic planning. Trustees have been asked to provide guidance in an uncertain world while facing scrutiny, and even anger, from stakeholders (faculty, students, parents, etc.). Stressful times take a toll, and institutions are likely to see turnover among board trustees. For the enrollment professional, that means some of your strongest advocates could exit, leaving you with the task of building new relationships.***

For institutions to succeed, everyone on the board must understand the role and challenges faced by enrollment management teams and be receptive to your messages. In *Persuading People*, published by the Harvard Business Press, receptivity is defined as "an audience's openness to a persuader and his or her ideas."[2]

1 Retrieved from: https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/invisible-college-boards-trustees-move-spotlight
2 Persuading People (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press, 2008), PP 20-21.

They also identify six categories defining the various degrees of receptivity where new board members could fall:

- Hostile – disagrees with you
- Neutral – understands your position, but still needs convincing
- Uninterested – informed, but doesn't care
- Uninformed – lacks information and needs convincing
- Supportive – already agrees with you
- Mix – contains a cross-section of attitudes and views

It is likely you could experience any one of these categories in your work with new or sitting board members moving forward, so you must be armed with not only a persuasive posture, but also knowledge and evidence regarding your case. As you begin thinking about how to orient your new board advocates, key concepts will need to be shared in order for them to successfully navigate on your behalf. Keep reading for helpful tips, and learn more about what sitting vice presidents had to say about their experience.

Education is a Must

Scott A. Schulz, Ph.D., the Vice President for Enrollment Management at Baldwin Wallace University and adjunct professor at Pennsylvania State University, has served in cabinet-level positions for many years."To build relationships with new board members, I serve as an educator and a guide," Dr. Schulz said. "As an educator, my responsibility is to provide trustees with a foundation, beginning with the understanding that enrollment management is fundamentally about managing the needs and expectations of people, both inside and outside the institution. Trustees need to be in a position to recognize the elements of a successful enrollment operation, components of a functional and effective enrollment funnel, and the inherent trade-offs related to the pursuit of quality, access, and revenue. As a guide, my role is to provide historical data, market insight, and strategic options to the trustees, while steering our collective efforts toward the pursuit of enrollment goals informed by the institutional mission and values."

Rachel Nichols, Vice President for Enrollment Management at Lenoir-Rhyne University, said, "When it comes to enrollment management, it's important for board members to understand their role – which is not to tell us who to admit. At many small private institutions, revenue is tuition-driven. Financial aid leveraging is crucial, and new board members should be taught fundamental concepts like the difference between net tuition revenue versus the tuition discount." Ms. Nichols also pointed out that college admissions are much different from when the board members were making college choices. "For institutions to succeed, you need strong systems and technology support."

Cynthia Peterson, M.Ed., the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Enrollment at Piedmont College, said, "Since most colleges and universities are dependent on tuition revenue, enrollment is the key ingredient for an institution's financial health. Understanding the socioeconomic qualities, motivations, and satisfaction of enrolled students is critical for new board members."

At Piedmont College, Ms. Peterson has facilitated interactions between students and board members that ranged from formal presentations to conversations during group lunches. She also educates new board members on important demographic trends, using the detailed data and projections found in the WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education) report, *Knocking at the College Door*. Ms. Peterson said, "Analyzing high school graduation rates by region and by ethnicity and race for the next five to ten year period is critical to board members' understanding of the potential state of an institution and to align budgets with priorities."

Making a Case for Institutional Distinctiveness

When it comes to building relationships with new board members, Stefanie Niles, Ed.D., Vice President for Enrollment and Communications at Ohio Wesleyan University, agrees with Peterson—the VP should educate new board members about demographics and changing expectations. "Trustees should have a firm grasp of the data around college attendance and persistence for all the populations their college enrolls. This could be traditional-aged, first-year, non-traditional, transfers, students of color, first-generation students, low socioeconomic status students, international students, and others. Understanding both institutional, state, and national enrollment trends for these subgroups helps the board gain a realistic picture of enrollment expectations. Additionally, changing demographics bring different financial, academic, cultural, and emotional needs, requiring new types of support for students."

Institutional distinctiveness is another area where Dr. Niles believes there needs to be a focus. She said, "Students are inundated with catchy emails, pretty campus pictures, and similar messages describing the 'exceptional' and 'transformative' opportunities an institution provides. ***How can they tell them apart?*** Being distinctive and showcasing your distinctive qualities and programs is imperative when the marketplace is so crowded. Articulating a value proposition for the institution should start with its leadership, and the board should be part of these strategic deliberations. Both long-time and new trustees should be supportive of achieving outcomes in their role as financial stewards of the institution."

Plan for Practical Considerations

The Investment Model of Commitment Processes, developed by Caryl E. Rusbult, Ph.D., is one of the best-known and most influential theoretical frameworks in the area of close relationships. This model holds that one factor influencing commitment is the investment in the relationship and the persistence of the interactions.[3] Building relationships and educating board members will be subject to time constraints and limiting conversation opportunities.

3 Retrieved from: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/psychpubs/26/

Dr. Schulz said, "Some boards meet more frequently than others. For those boards that meet 2-3 times per year, it is important to be more comprehensive, establish and revisit definitions, present contextual information related to the external market, and provide updates regarding current recruitment and retention efforts. During COVID, the board at Baldwin Wallace University began to meet monthly. This helped facilitate even greater dialogue between administrators and board members, leading to more targeted meetings and collaborative efforts designed to solve immediate challenges and discuss future opportunities."

Jameia A. Tennie, M.S., Director of Undergraduate Admissions at North Carolina A&T State University, also has practical tips for helping new board members understand enrollment management's role and challenges. To ensure credibility, she recommends sharing third-party data, such as WICHE and census reports, along with institutional data. It isn't enough to just share your own data without a backdrop against which to compare it. Siloed institutional data is limiting and does not help board members better understand the entire enrollment landscape at a national level.

Ms. Tennie further suggests that "when designing board presentations aimed at showing the student's progression toward enrollment, be sure the presentation is easy to follow and common enrollment terms are explained." This strategy keeps discussions on track and reduces time spent on explanations needed to satisfy the understanding of new board members.

As a way to both educate and build commitment among trustees to her department's mission, Ms. Tennie said, "I also provide opportunities for new board members to engage with faculty, staff, and students, and invite them to recruitment events so they can personally experience recruiting efforts."

Strategies like these help board members see the connection between data, tactics, and outcomes. A deeper understanding of the process, competitive environment, and challenges create a stronger link between the job and budget requirements.

Positive dynamics increase the effectiveness of any group. Educating and building relationships with new trustees, while helping them understand the importance of institutional distinctiveness, are some of the many ways you can contribute to ensure your institution's board supports enrollment initiatives. Dr. Schulz said, "Be the face of enrollment, but maintain a collective, team-oriented approach with trustees. Celebrate your collective successes and work through your challenges. You're in this together!"

What About Pitfalls and Dangers?

The "drinking from a firehose" analogy is an apt one when applied to new board members who are gulping down large amounts of information. Dr. Schulz offers these tips for success:

1 Realize you need to provide the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Trust in trustees' desire to want what is best for the institution, rather than viewing them as adversaries evaluating your effectiveness as an enrollment manager. You will be less tempted to over-promise and spin data to fit a particular narrative. Instead, work with trustees to examine the evidence and find a collective way forward.

2 Don't make assumptions.

Enrollment managers employ a lot of tools and utilize a ton of field-specific jargon. Don't assume people who do not work in the enrollment sector understand or interpret the information the same way you do. For example, enrollment managers realize headcount and financial aid model forecasts are not a guarantee. These models may set up false or unrealistic expectations if they are not properly presented and contextualized.

3 Admit your mistakes.

When success depends on the decisions of 17-year-olds made within an ever-changing environment, mistakes will be made. Trustees are human. They realize errors happen. Trust and humility go farther than efforts to create a persona falsely projecting an unrealistic degree of perfection.

4 Define success.

Often, enrollment management success is narrowly defined by reaching a series of standard metrics – first-year headcount, GPA, test scores, diversity, and net revenue indicators. In reality, multiple metrics across numerous populations should also be considered when assessing the effectiveness of an institution's enrollment approach. Metrics centered on student and family satisfaction following a visit or engagement should be considered, as well as metrics focused on the morale and well-being of enrollment staff.

THEN & NOW:

Changes in the Enrollment Management Landscape

Board members often have perceptions shaped by nostalgia about their own college experience. Keep trustees anchored in the present by providing "then and now" recruiting scenarios.

THEN	NOW
The majority of students wanted a traditional in-class, on-campus experience.	Students are more willing to consider non-traditional or accreditation programs, which means institutions face more competition.
Classes took place on campus.	Students want options, like attending on-campus classes during fall and spring and then taking online courses during the summer.
When you got loans, your degree would allow you to earn enough to pay them off and still live comfortably.	More students are concerned about debt, and fewer students believe a degree guarantees economic security.
NACAC's ethical standards prevented institutions from recruiting committed students.	In 2019, NACAC voted to eliminate the standards that prevented poaching. Recruiting now can be a gloves-off, fight to the end where schools offer increasing amounts of financial aid to change minds, leading to higher melt and less certainty about making a class.
High school students who wanted to attend college participated in standardized tests, which created a pool of identified leads for recruiting.	There is a growing percentage of test-optional institutions. When students skip the standardized test, it reduces the number of available leads in the test-taking pool.
Amenities did not play a significant role in determining the choice of a college.	Gen Z students compare amenities when they compare schools.
The majority of the recruiting effort went into recruiting high school students.	Today, schools need to recruit to a broader base, including high school students, working adults seeking undergraduate degrees, and graduate students.
Students with families who could afford to pay for college selected four-year institutions. When families were financially strapped, students were less likely to choose a four-year college, often opting for community college instead.	Financial aid has "evened the playing field" for many students. With federal and state grants, many students from all socio-economic backgrounds are choosing four-year schools. And some families with financial means are opting for a community college as a strategy to reduce student debt.
A college degree led to financial stability and career success.	More students question if they need a college degree.
Career support services consisted of an office where you could sign-up for on-campus interviews and get help on your résumé.	Students expect career support services to help them identify strengths and skills, find internships, and ultimately, help them get a job.
If a student wasn't prepared to succeed, they were expected to figure out how to get the help they needed.	Many institutions have developed programs to help students succeed and complete their degrees.
Students expected the campus to provide activities on weekends, as most students didn't have access to transportation or money for events.	Today's students are mobile, connected by social media, and have access to credit cards. They no longer think of the campus as "home" but a place where they "work" during the week and take off on weekends like adults.

GET FOUND

SEO Lessons from STEM University

"When I was a kid, my parents moved a lot, but I always found them."
– Rodney Dangerfield

Top Three Impact Information Sources for Students Searching for a College*

1. **Emails from schools**
2. **Word of mouth from family and friends**
3. **Institutional websites**

**The Eduventures 2019 Student Sentiment Research Report*

By Nicholas Balk, M.S.

The world most college administrators grew up in – where students searched for their college or university with encyclopedic books like the Princeton Review's *Best Colleges Guide* – is a bygone era. Prospective students now have online access to a treasure trove of information about thousands of colleges. The Eduventures 2019 *Student Sentiment Research Report* proves the importance of the website. Study data showed college websites were the third-highest impact information source for generating awareness about an institution.[1] This data underscores what enrollment management professionals already know: your website is a crucially important marketing tool to make prospective students aware of your existence.

The importance of an institution's website does not diminish as students move through the recruitment funnel. If anything, it heightens. According to the same report, college websites are the second most important information source for students in determining where to apply and attend, followed only by the campus visit.[2] The Eduventures report was completed pre-pandemic. With many students deprived of college visits or attending accepted student events, it is fair to state websites now carry an even bigger load for student recruiting.

Optimizing your website for search engines (known as Search Engine Optimization or SEO) is a tremendous opportunity to increase the likelihood that prospective students find you in the first place—and that they find the *most relevant* webpages during their decision-making journey.

To illustrate this, let us examine STEM University, a fictional institution desiring to recruit more students for its pre-med programs. This case study offers insight into how a lack of SEO investment can negatively impact recruiting and then provides suggestions for improvement.

STEM University: Mistakes and Opportunities

STEM University, in Springfield, IL, enrolled students in 26 Bachelors programs and has strength in both the health sciences and the natural sciences. Several majors stand out as a particularly strong match for their pre-med students, including biology, chemistry, physics, and public health. STEM University also offers a health sciences major. However, the program does not include many of the advanced hard science coursework expected by medical schools because it is intended as a pre-nursing program or as preparation for careers in allied health professions, requiring a different type of academic preparation than medicine.

STEM University struggled to enroll pre-med students. This was a source of institutional frustration because leadership

1 Retrieved from https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/annual-eduventures-student-sentiment-research-report-examines-the-communication-preferences-of-college-bound-high-school-students-1028655422#
2 Ibid

believed there was strong alignment between the school's mission and academic offerings and the goals of this large prospective student audience. Growing the number of pre-med students was a key component of the University's new 5-year plan.

STEM University hired an enrollment consultant to provide recommendations on how to increase pre-med student enrollment. ***The consultant immediately noticed there is no clearly defined pathway laid out on the website for students who are looking for a pre-med track.*** Upon digging deeper, the consultant uncovered competition among programs vying to be the premiere pre-med major at the University. The consultant discovered the Provost had previously declared, to reduce competition and possible disharmony, that *any* of the college's academic programs can be a pathway toward medical school.

The consultant analyzed the website's content. There was little mention of essential keywords, such as "medical," "medical school," and "pre-med" on the pages, including on the academic program pages, generated by the Provost's office. When the consultant searched for "Pre-med programs near Springfield" on Google, the first page results included Shelbyville University, a competitor college in a neighboring city, but not STEM University. STEM University didn't show up for pre-med until the third page of Google results.

When the consultant searched for specific information about the school by typing the phrase "pre-med program at STEM University," the health sciences program came up as the top result. Since the health sciences program was not a good fit for students searching for a pre-med program, potential students often disqualified STEM University early in the search process.

The consultant concluded that prospective pre-med students were having a hard time finding STEM University and made the following strategic recommendations:

1. Create a standalone pre-med webpage so that search engines can find it
2. Add words like "pre-med," "medical," "medicine," "medical school," and "MCAT" to the academic's homepage as well as to program pages such as biology, physics, chemistry, and public health
3. Create defined pre-med tracks for all academic majors, which will be added to both the standalone pre-med page and to academic program pages
4. Increase marketing department capacity to monitor website SEO on an ongoing basis

STEM moved forward to implement the recommendations and quickly saw an increase in page traffic and new inquiries who were interested in pre-med.

Recommendations for Improving Your SEO

So how can you go about improving Search Engine Optimization at your institution to support your recruitment strategies? While good SEO requires both skills and an ongoing time investment, enrollment and marketing teams with limited capacity can take proactive steps for a positive, and often immediate, impact.

RECOMMENDATION 1.

Start with an audit.

Before you can define your SEO strategy, you need a clear understanding of where you stand. Start by identifying important keywords. Determine where you and your competitors rank. What keywords bring in the most organic traffic? Where do you need to improve? If you discover you must overcome low rankings for crucial keywords, consider using paid Google search ads while you work on seeding keywords into web pages.

Keystone College offers both A.A. and B.S. degrees in Wildlife Biology, and their 170-acre woodland campus is the perfect location for field experiences. Using a robust marketing strategy, they have ensured they can be found by potential students searching for Wildlife Biology. Jennifer Sekol, M.S., Director of Admissions, reports that Keystone draws students outside their typical recruiting area as a result.

RECOMMENDATION 2.

Make sure the right keywords are on the right webpages.

STEM University missed opportunities for organic traffic because the search engine algorithms could not find relevant keywords. Know what keywords students use during different stages of search. Map these keywords to appropriate webpages. It is a comprehensive process at the outset, and also something to review and maintain on an ongoing basis because search engine algorithms continuously evolve.

RECOMMENDATION 3.

Update your website content frequently.

Search engines use bots to scan websites. Each time you update content on your website, it is an opportunity to be re-indexed by search engines and increase your ranking for relevant keywords. Adding topical content – for example, a blog or a podcast on a pre-med topic – increases the number of keywords on your website.

RECOMMENDATION 4.

Include your most important keywords in webpage URLs.

Similar to adding keywords to relevant pages, adding your most important and most relevant keywords in your webpage URLs will make it easier for search engines to find you.

RECOMMENDATION 5.

Make the most of metadata.

Website metadata consists of a page title tag and meta description for every page. The title meta tag is the description your website visitors see at the top of their browser tab and as the headline within search engine results. Search engines seek meta tags for keywords, just as they search for keywords within your webpages' content. Keep meta tags updated and relevant to the respective webpage.

The meta description summarizes what is contained on a webpage, and it is typically shown right below a search engine result. While Google does not currently scan meta descriptions for keywords, a compelling meta description motivates potential students to click-through to your website. Higher click-through rates also positively impact future search engine rankings.

RECOMMENDATION 6.

Cross-link your most relevant webpages.

Cross-linking helps search engine algorithms understand the structure of your website and how your webpages are related. Suppose STEM University were to cross-link its biology and pre-med webpages, but not its health sciences and pre-med webpages. In this case, it signals search engines that biology is more related to pre-med than health sciences. Map and review your website structure regularly, including cross-links.

To maximize your website's value as a marketing tool, producing strong content is a good start, but it is not enough to ensure the world will find you. Robust, intentional SEO helps enrollment management professionals compete by increasing both the quality and the quantity of your website visitors and positions your institution as a well-traveled destination for potential recruits.

Traditional lead pools are shrinking for demographic and behavioral reasons. To maximize the success of Student Search, enrollment management professionals must have a basic understanding of their institution's approach to SEO and how they compare to competitors. To dip your toes in the water and find out where you stand, **consider investing in a competitive analysis.** You can simply follow FUEL's formula. First, compare SEO at your school with three competitors, then look at a variety of factors, such as ranking keywords, ad spend, domain ranking, and authority measures. If you would like to learn more about SEO or take a deeper dive into the FUEL formula, contact a member of our team, and we will be happy to share more information.

Nicholas Balk, M.S., is the Regional Vice President of University Partnerships (Northeast) at enrollmentFUEL. Serving as the Director of Admissions at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences gave Nick first-hand experience with the impact of SEO on Student Search, and the expertise to assist clients when they are implementing new digital strategies. Contact Nick at nick.balk@enrollmentfuel.com.

CAN LOOK-ALIKE MODELING REPLACE TRADITIONAL LIST PURCHASING?

By Mike Wesner, M.Ed.

As the enrollmentFUEL team talks to enrollment vice presidents around the country, one topic comes up again and again, and that is how to find leads when fewer students take tests. We have researched this topic since 2018, when I wrote an *Octane* article titled, "360 Degree Digital Advertising Strategies." There has been an obvious trend for many schools to explore becoming test-optional, and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this timeline. Many enrollment strategists feel we are still a few years away from not being able to buy names from testing agencies. Still, schools are already starting to feel the strain in this cycle because the volume for certain profiles of names has been limited.

At enrollmentFUEL, we have drawn on our experience of finding graduate students and non-traditional students to help schools grow programs. With such campaigns, you often don't have known lists and may want to budget for specialized and innovative tactics as you plan your future strategies. You also may be pleasantly surprised to learn the outlook for finding leads is good and can cost you less than purchasing names from traditional sources.

> Look-alike modeling, combined with digital advertising, is one answer to consider. ***Why?*** Because institutions often need to expand their audience and find potential students who profile a certain way and act like your enrolled students.

Building a new audience starts much the same way as a good name buy strategy. Enrollment history and regression tools help us identify attributes desired within qualified populations. Today, and in the future, such attributes inform us how to build the algorithmic models when list purchasing is not an option.

Simply said, we review your enrollment history to find your future students. We can now do that with either known (traditional) lists or with newly modeled names that provide you households—which can then be served digital ads across several channels. Historical data is analyzed using multivariate regression against a large reference set for various traits. Evaluations are made to identify patterns among demographic, geographic, and activity/behavioral characteristics. Once patterns are identified, the software returns a list of suspects that closely mirror your current and most recently enrolled students' households. In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, these suspects can be further identified based on various *household* characteristics such as income, buying patterns, and educational level.

While you will not have test scores with this data set, the data is still very rich with information. However, there can be some challenges if you're not prepared. For example, in a look-alike list, you receive household-level data, so you won't immediately have access to the student's name or their email. For these reasons, we recommend when recruiting a look-alike population, you start Student Search with digital advertising (banner ads and social media ads). enrollmentFUEL also recommends tools identifying who visits your website. These tools let you hear the background symphony and will become the bedrock of what we think will drive Student Search campaigns in the future. Your team will work in newly formed Student Search strategies where:

- Modeling builds lists
- Digital ads drive students to your website
- Visit activity is captured to create your new-found inquiry pool, constructed from modeling and identifying stealth visitors

Today, the technology we use to place code on school websites tells us who visited at the household level with good precision. Traditionally, we matched this data against existing purchased lists (enrollmentFUEL's matchBACK™ solution). For some client-partners, after a student visits their site, we fire off a mail piece. It is printed on demand and sent to the home we identified, with a call to action to visit a specific landing page with a form. Triggered mailings and slowly batched emails help you build on initial interest and capture personalized information.

More than 1,200[1] schools have already dropped testing requirements. Some institutions made the choice because administrators decided they were not the most effective way to gauge a student's potential. For others, it was a response to the pandemic. Whatever the reason, the number of leads traditionally available will shrink over time. In the absence of lists, look-alike modeling can help you build your traditional and non-traditional inquiry pools in a smarter and more economical way.

If you would like to learn how enrollmentFUEL uses look-alike modeling to help enrollment teams reach their goals, contact me, and I will be happy to share more.

1 Retrieved from: https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/08/10/nacac-statement-seeks-make-test-optional-admissions-clear

Mike Wesner, M.Ed., is the founder and Chief Imagination Officer of enrollmentFUEL, and the creator of the company's annual holiday called BOAT DAY. He has imagined better ways to do Student Search and recruitment for more than 15 years. You can reach Mike at mike.wesner@enrollmentfuel.com.

EMAILING UNENGAGED

Adapting to Succeed Today and Tomorrow

By Jay T. Fedje, MA

Enrollment managers have been trained to squeeze everything they can out of their prospective student inquiry list. In the late stages of the recruitment cycle, this is often called "non-responder recruiting." In other words, you did everything you could with your name purchase/inquiry list, and for a subset of students, recruiting activities didn't produce any meaningful engagement.

I used to call this group my "freezer list" of cold prospects. Like other enrollment managers, I was trained to think if I squeezed a few more applicants out of that group, I won the battle. As I saw it, the most affordable recruitment strategy was to keep emailing these poor barraged prospects with endless messages. This is how I saw it: Email was practically free, so there was nothing to lose--just keep sending emails, and keep my fingers crossed, and hope one of the ice-cold names on the list would relent and respond.

Times change, and what many enrollment managers don't fully understand, there is a hidden cost to sending emails to non-responders – it's called your domain reputation score. This is the score email providers assign to you as they monitor and manage your email activity. The higher the score, the more likely your email will be placed in the appropriate folder in the recipient's inbox. The lower the score, the more likely your emails will be placed in junk or spam folders. If a score goes too low, your school's domain could be labeled as a spam sender – commonly referred to as "blacklisted."

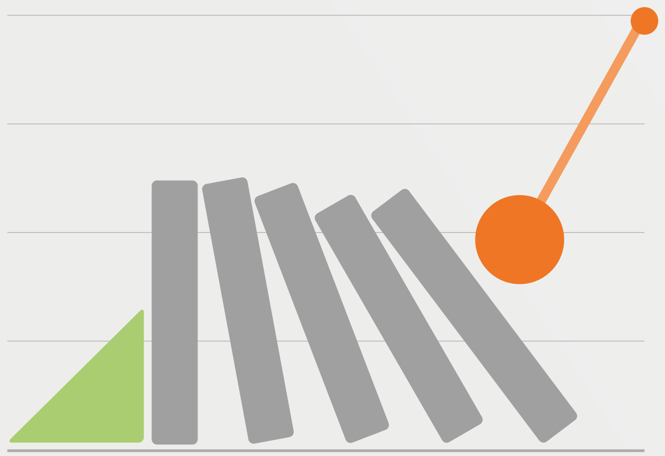
Email service providers use algorithms to calculate your score – but the algorithms are never released to the public. Likewise, the algorithm can change without notice, as it did in the fourth quarter of 2019 when Google (Gmail) changed its email rules.

Marketing and tech geeks who are closely monitoring Google's practices for email deliverability and search engine optimization (SEO) effectiveness have grown accustomed to random "slaps" from Google. Overnight, algorithms change, rewarding different practices, and keeping everyone on their toes. The fall 2019 *slap* rocked email systems within the college landscape because a large percentage (more than half in many of the campaigns managed by enrollmentFUEL) of all email addresses purchased by colleges had a Gmail email address.

Gmail created a range of messaging folders (primary, social, promotions, and updates) to accompany their junk folder. Like all Google changes, this wasn't discussed with enrollment officers or business leaders before going into effect – Google just deployed the new rules. For those not paying close attention at the time, email reports seemed to be coming back with exceptionally strong open rates. However, what they didn't realize was Gmail was opening the email and hitting links to test them for spam characteristics. In other words, Gmail was deciding which folder to put the email in. Each time an email was left dormant or trashed by the recipient, Gmail took note of that inactivity and recalculated the domain's reputation score, often lowering it in the process. While enrollment managers were thinking they finally cracked the Gmail code to get their emails opened, in truth, they saw false positives. When reputation scores decreased, more and more emails ended up being dumped into junk folders.

Non-responder strategies don't create online reputation problems, but they do accelerate them. Eventually, enrollment managers became aware that their emails, while appearing to be opened, were not. Students didn't see what was sent because they went dormant once they landed in folders like promotions, updates, or junk – or worse yet, they were blocked altogether.

The reputation score is a topic we continually study at enrollmentFUEL. One key take-away to bear in mind is that while it is simple and quick to impact your score poorly, it can be difficult and time-consuming to raise it back up. If you want to ensure your reputation score remains healthy, FUEL recommends a mini internal audit, and we are excited to share a rubric to assist you.



Here are seven questions enrollment leaders should be asking if they are interested in managing their school's domain reputation score:

#1 Am I able to monitor real email activity?

Because it is crucial to capture your email activity, it is equally important to distinguish between opens by *real* recipients and clicks from email provider Spambots and filters. It is a challenge to assess data in a world where there are ever-evolving rules, tricks, and techniques used by email providers to filter real versus spam email. This "chess-match" with email providers will never end, so be aware, and plan for the game.

#2 Have I planned for alternative communication channels in my non-responder tactics?

Direct mail, social media banner ads, calling campaigns, and SMS texting (when appropriate) are other methods to consider. When emails don't work as well as you hoped, have you planned (and budgeted) for an alternate method to recruit these suspects?

#3 Am I monitoring and cleaning suspect/inquiry email lists from hard bounces, undeliverables, and opt-outs?

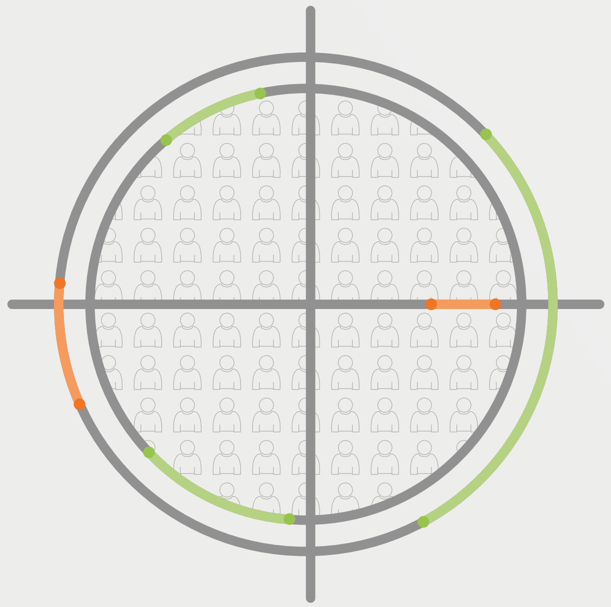
Each email campaign should be analyzed upon completion, and all adverse email outcomes should be assessed and acted upon. Hard-bounces, opt-outs, and undeliverable emails should be removed from the database, and those prospects should be placed in an alternate communication flow.

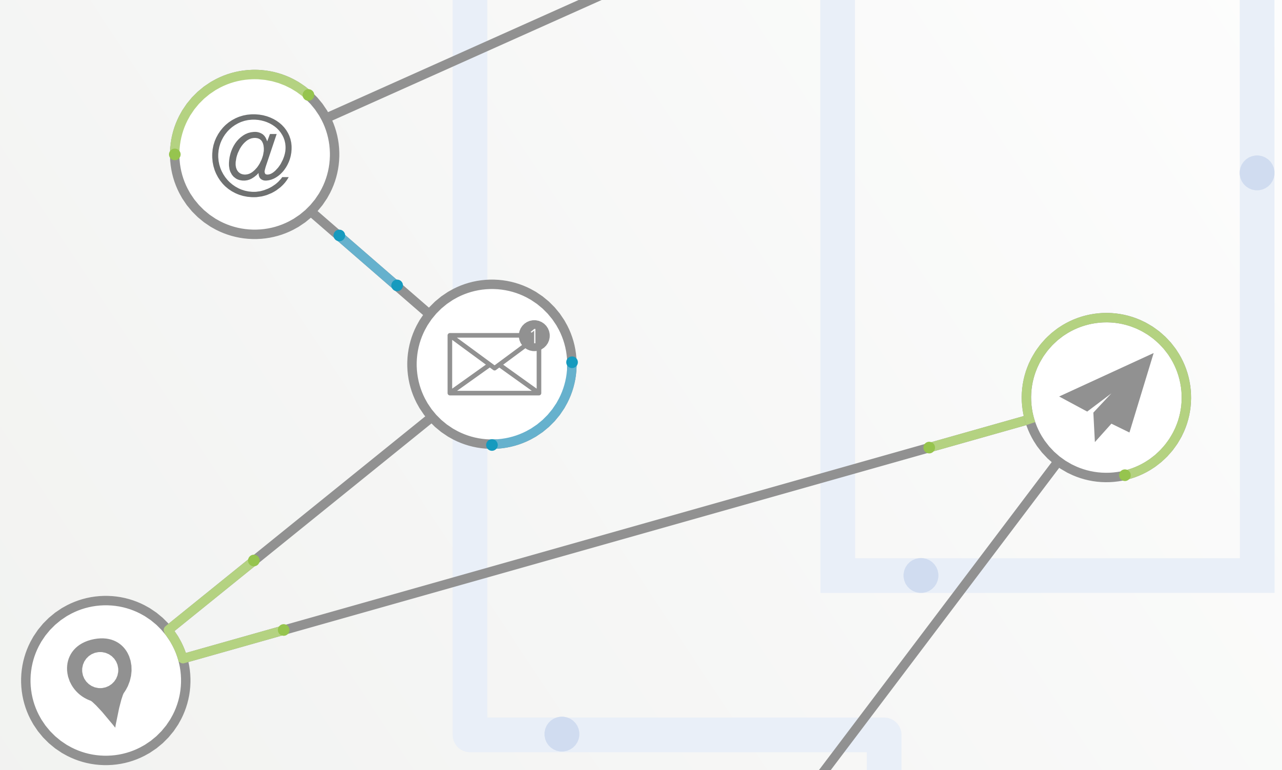
#4 Am I periodically using an email validation/verification software to identify undeliverable emails and potential problems?

Bad emails will invariably creep into your database. Email addresses of today's suspects go stale, quickly. You also might have collected "spam traps" over time. These emails are designed to test if the sender is, in fact, a spammer. Email senders, like you, should occasionally weed out the emails that give you headaches. Blocker software like GlochApps or Email on Acid can help identify undeliverable emails so you can remove them before your next email campaign.

#5 Am I utilizing a reputation scoring software to monitor my domain score?

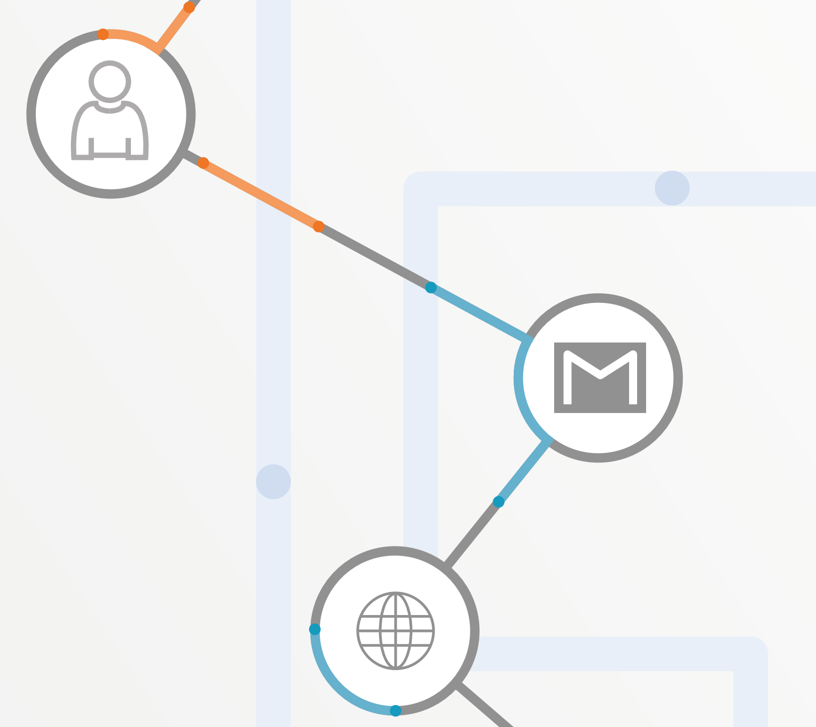
You can be confident that a high percentage of your recruits are using Gmail. So, it is critical to make sure your reputation score with Gmail is solid so that your emails hitting Gmail addresses get to the right folder. You can continually monitor your school's domain reputation with software like Sender Score, Google Postmaster, or Microsoft Smart Network Data Services of SNDS. Every college or university must have staff members tasked with monitoring their school's reputation score. Be aware that admissions isn't the only department affecting a school's score. When you consider all the departments that send mass email campaigns (Development, Alumni, Athletics, the President's Office), there are countless opportunities to damage your reputation score if it is not regularly monitored and managed.





#6 Am I monitoring from where my prospective student names are coming?

How is the prospective student's data being captured and provided to me? Too often, enrollment managers buy lists of prospect names that have been sitting on the "data shelf" for months or years. As a result, email addresses erode and become outdated causing nothing but problems for your campaign. Asking the list provider *when* the names were captured and *how* they were captured is critical (and too often overlooked). Some suspects fill out a survey or complete a college assessment test (SAT or ACT), so you'll know *when* and *how* those names and biographical data were captured. Be aware when you are getting compiled data from old student surveys. Other lists are generated by collecting student data from associations (church denominations or school data files). When you can find out the "when" or "how" information about the data on a list, take extra steps to clean the list after your purchase.



#7 Am I measuring the "shelf-life" of students' email addresses?

While home addresses are relatively stable, students' emails change more regularly. You may have old, outdated, or abandoned email addresses in your system. If you get a street address wrong, you pay a return mail fee, but there are no future negative implications for sending mail. If you get emails wrong too often, it will impact your ability to send future emails to appropriate inboxes of students who are actually viable.

Jay T. Fedje, MA, serves as Vice President of Client Services at enrollmentFUEL. He is a seasoned leader with expertise in enrollment management, strategic planning, funnel development, university branding, targeted student search, CRM implementation, predictive modeling, financial aid leveraging, communication plan development, retention modeling, organizational structure, and market expansion. To learn more about online reputation management, contact Jay at jay.fedje@enrollmentfuel.com.

enrollmentFUEL
306 West Franklin Street, Suite F
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

At FUEL, We Know Digital Advertising — We Know Enrollment Management

This cycle, **compete and win** in the world of online advertising by putting enrollmentFUEL's team of enrollment and advertising experts to work for you. We are excited to share these popular solutions outlined below. These strategic packages take you where the action is and provide the immediate tools and tactics you need to identify fresh leads, increase yield, and reduce melt.

THE FINDER

Get found by new leads. Increase organic traffic, heighten brand awareness, and amplify your voice in the digital sphere. Whether you want to strengthen your Student Search infrastructure or grow adult and graduate programs, this program has what you need.

- SEO Audit for you and three competitors
- Brand reputation audit for email delivery optimization
- Enrollment website analysis
- Social media channel and content review

THE PROPELLER

Break through the noise to propel your brand past competitors. Generate real-time leads from organic traffic, look-alike modeling, digital advertising, and social advertising strategies. Collect a wealth of information to support data analytics and decision making.

- Programmatic digital strategy and IP targeting advertising
- Creative design and messaging strategies
- Social media advertising
- Comprehensive reporting
- inquiryDETECTOR™ and matchBACK™ lead identification technologies

THE COLLECTOR

Maximize conversion with a powerful trifecta of digital solutions: SEM (Search Engine Marketing), SMM (Social Media Marketing), and PPC (Pay Per Click) advertising. This comprehensive solution also includes persona development, influencer strategies, SEO, campaign support, and data analytics.

- Micro-Influencer strategies
- Student persona development
- Social media review and form capture
- Enrollment website integration analysis
- SEO management
- Landing page(s)
- Digital IP targeting and retargeting
- Social media advertising (all platforms)
- Search Engine Marketing (SEM)
- Pay Per Click (PPC)
- Comprehensive reporting

Our clients who experienced record enrollment in 2020 had one thing in common — they used digital marketing to AMPLIFY their Student Search efforts.

CONTACT US NOW Mike Wesner • mike.wesner@enrollmentfuel.com • 919.306.8122

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