OCTANE

ACTIONABLE INSIGHT
REMARKABLE TOPICS

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enrollmentFUEL

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LETTER FROM

OUR CHIEF IMAGINATION OFFICER

I believe we can climb mountains and reach new heights faster when we work and learn together.

Dear Octane Booster:

When the enrollmentFUEL team published the first issue of *Octane* in May 2017, we believed the future was bright for institutions and enrollment leaders who were willing to innovate, learn, and find their next big idea. Five years later, we still feel the same way. Those of you who know me know I am inversely paranoid by nature. Even when facing challenges, I am optimistic. And I believe we can climb mountains and reach new heights faster when we work and learn together.

We have a strong lineup of information to help your institution thrive. If increasing the number of adult learners is a goal, read Dr. Kimberly K. Estep's article, "Customize to Actualize Increased Enrollment: Marketing to Adult Learners," which is filled with statistics and insight.

Our president, Dr. Jacquelyn D. Elliott, and consultant and thought leader, Jeremy Tiers, both look at questioning skills. Jacqui examines what you *should* ask, and Jeremy reviews at what you *should never* ask. Data Expert and CEO of Inroads Analytics, Gerald Stanley, will make you smile and think in his article, "May the Wookiee Speak to You!"

In "Musings of Two First-Year Admission Advisors," Victoria Beck and Tiffany Hines from Piedmont University share thoughts on their first year in the field. And enrollmentFUEL website expert Rory Green offers practical advice on maintaining SEO rankings when redesigning your website.

enrollmentFUEL is both a teaching and a learning organization, so we love exchanging ideas with the *Octane* community. If you are optimistic about the future, please reach out and share why you believe it is an excellent time to be a member of the enrollment community. If you have a different view, I want to hear from you, too, because our goal is to support the vital work you do with information that helps you succeed. If you would like to set up a time to talk, please email me at mike.wesner@enrollmentfuel.com.

Yours in collaboration,

MIKE

Mike Wesner
Chief Imagination Officer

enrollmentFUEL would like to extend our gratitude to Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama, 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 and ideas from leadership in all areas dedicated to improving your Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Search strategies. Our goal is to fuel creativity and release positive energy among enrollment professionals.

inside OCTANE

SCAN HERE TO SEE PAST ISSUES OF OCTANE

QUICK TAKES

FAST *reads and* ***INNOVATIVE*** *ideas to* ***BOOST*** *positive results*

E.A.T. to Win

Are you looking for ways to increase your lead pool through organic Search Engine Optimization (SEO)? Then you won't want to miss *Episode 25* of the *Enrollment Edge* Podcast.

Podcast host, Jay Fedje, interviews Rory Green, enrollmentFUEL's web development specialist. They discuss the E.A.T. concept, which stands for Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness, along with quality raters, black and white hatters, and Google algorithms. Rory shares six key takeaways that can immediately impact website effectiveness and improve your organic search strategy.

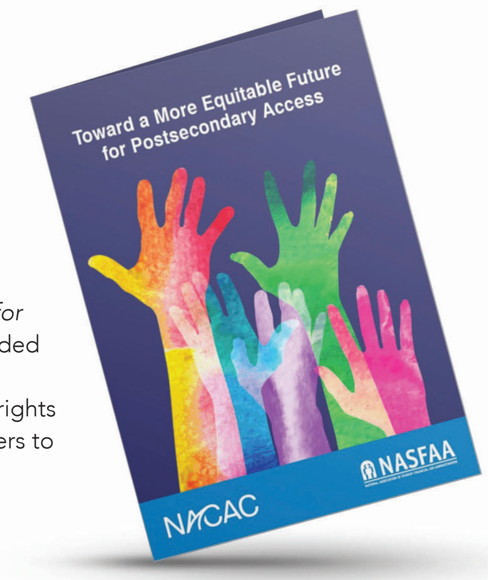
Available on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app.

Must-Read Report

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) partnered to produce *Toward a More Equitable Future for Postsecondary Access*. This report was funded by the Lumina Association, which works in partnership with education, business, civil rights organizations, and government policymakers to reimagine how and where learning occurs.

The report studies the impediments to racial equity in the college admission and financial aid environment. It recommends a series of actions for educational institutions, admission and financial aid practitioners, and government agencies.

If expanding opportunities for diverse groups is part of your institution's mission, download this free report today.



READ NOW

Will We See You At The Slate Innovation Festival in June?

The Slate Innovation Festival takes place June 16 and 17, 2022, in Nashville, Tennessee. enrollmentFUEL is a Slate Gold Preferred Partner, and several members of our team will be at this fun learning event. If you plan to attend and would like to join with others in the *Octane* community for FUEL's Slate Summit Dinner on Wednesday, June 15, 2022 at 6:30 p.m., ***please email Susanna Mayo, Director of Slate Education at susanna.mayo@enrollmentfuel.com.***

Scan to Learn More About enrollmentFUEL's Slate Training and Consulting Solutions.

What Will Happen to No. 2 Pencil Sales?

The College Board, the organization administering the SAT and PSAT, has announced the SAT will be going digital. International students will test virtually in 2023, followed by American students in 2024. The current test takes approximately three hours, but the digital test relies on adaptive testing, allowing students to complete it in less time. Students will log in and take the test in proctored settings. Reading sections will be shorter, and students can use calculators during the entire math section, which differs from the current No. 2 pencil and paper test. Testing in the virtual format also means students will receive scores in days instead of weeks.

READ NOW

Better Emails Start with Smart SPAM-Free Subject Lines

If you want to improve email deliverability to Gmail and Apple addresses and other providers, check out enrollmentFUEL's blog post, "Don't Avoid the Subject: SPAM Words Could Sabotage Your Email Efforts." It's a quick read filled with practical tips and a list of words and phrases to avoid.

Valuable and Thought-Provoking Content

"Dear White Parents" is a public awareness campaign launched in August 2021. It was conceived by Margenett Moore-Roberts, Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer at marketing services agency IPG DXTRA. The project includes a film and discussion guides to help families have meaningful conversations about race, racism, and equity in society.

We encourage you to watch the film with your team and discuss reactions and experiences. By working together, we can open minds and change hearts, and make our educational institutions a place where every student finds acceptance, equity, and opportunities.

DO ASK THIS QUESTION—

The Art and Science of Problem-Solving

By Jacquelyn D. Elliott, Ed.D.

> "Is the work you are doing critical to getting a student to apply, be accepted, or deposit?"

You may or may not have already read another article in this issue of *Octane* entitled "Don't Ask This Question." So, to have a little fun, I thought I would juxtapose what questions TO ask—the difference being these questions are not necessarily geared toward your student recruit, and instead, are more about problem-solving.

If you are a regular reader of *Octane*, you know I do quite a bit of traveling, visiting colleges and universities around the country consulting on various topics. When consulting, there are two skillsets I rely on for effective problem-solving. The first is listening, and the second is asking the right questions.

When I first started in the field of enrollment management, I heard a mentor say, "The best Vice Presidents act like consultants on their own campuses." This thought struck me then, and the concept stuck with me over the years. When I served as the Vice President of Enrollment Management, I followed the advice, aided by a simple process Michael Stanier defines in *The Coaching Habit* as the 3Ps: Project, People, and Patterns.[1] Here, I will share a brief overview of what this means.

Project: The project gives the context for the situation in which the issue or problem exists. Because it's the easiest place to go, we often spend the most time defining this part of the problem-solving equation, but that can be a mistake. Be cautious about over-investing in project definition as part of your problem-solving methodology because it can trick you into spending too much time analyzing these parameters instead of focusing on what may be the *real* issue.

People: People always create an interesting paradigm. Often, when I consult with admission teams, the "people issues" appear to stand in the way of getting important work done. The discovery point here is recognizing that in many cases, the problem isn't really about a *person*—it's about the *relationship* between two people. A fracture exists and must be mended before the situation can improve.

Patterns: Lastly, when problem-solving, one must look for patterns. Patterns allow a leader to look for behavioral cues that need to be changed, or patterns that stand in the way of a project's progress because they impact how people work or interact. By watching for patterns, an opportunity usually emerges to talk about self-development and growth.

TAKEAWAY TIP: As a leader in your own office, you can act as an internal consultant using the three Ps of discovery to improve problem-solving. Not every situation calls for the use of all three, so look to discern which tactic is suitable for the moment. It was a personal game-changer once I started looking beyond the project and expanded my thinking to encompass people and patterns, which expanded my skills as an effective problem-solver.

The Question

Now, I'm going to throw you for a loop. Are you ready? Problem-solving isn't really about the *problem*; it's about the *question*. Vanessa Redgrave has many famous quotes, but one that resonates in my world of consulting is, "Ask the right questions if you're going to find the right answers."[2] After all, problem-solving is about finding the right answers, so the starting point matters.

While using the 3 Ps, it's important to know which questions to ask along the way. What people think of as the moment of discovery is really the ***discovery of the question***.[3] I have always loved this concept. We often *think* we have things figured out, but in fact, we *know* we have it figured out when we start asking the right questions.

So, what are the *right* questions? For me, it depends on what I am trying to accomplish. Here, I will share some of the best questions I have mastered as a result of reading Michael Stanier's book, referenced earlier.

1. The AWE Question:

I use this question when I need to create more time, get deeper information, or simply find myself yammering and need to "zip it." The AWE question is simple. Just ask, "**A**nd **W**hat **E**lse?" When I ask this question, I can sit back and listen. It forces me to stop talking, creates time for me to process information, and then allows a deeper conversation around options that hadn't been discussed on the surface. Usually, this encourages a person to finally reveal the "real" information that helps get to the heart of the problem and the "why." Once you have the why, you can more easily solve for the "what." This simple question creates possibilities that didn't exist before it was asked.

TAKEAWAY TIP: When you know what you need to ask, get to the point. Don't exhaust the problem-solving process with warmups, chit-chat, and meandering thoughts. Get to the point, ask, and then listen. When you feel yourself needing more time, or a deeper understanding, use the AWE question.

1 Stanier, Michael Bungay. *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever.* Toronto: Box of Crayons Press. 2016.

2 Retrieved from: https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/vanessa-redgrave-quotes

3 Retrieved from: https://kidadl.com/articles/jonas-salk-quotes-from-the-inventor-of-the-vaccine-against-polio

2. The Focus Question:

This one is probably best explained by sharing a story—it's a personal story. I have a blended family. My life partner has an 18-year old son named Luke. Like all teenagers, Luke is full of angst and trying to figure it all out. And, like all parents of a teenager, my partner, Ruben, often feels the same way. When I sit back and watch the two of them communicate, I can sometimes see that communication has missed the mark. For example, Luke will share a story because he is processing an event in his life. Ruben responds, giving his best fatherly advice. Hearing the response, Luke looks puzzled and at times even bewildered, because the advice isn't connecting with the issue Luke had tried to communicate.

In the world of work, we often do the same thing. We listen to the "problem" that is being presented in a story format, and then deliver our best advice. And sometimes, advice misses the mark because it doesn't apply to the real problem.

To ensure I address the right issue, I often ask, "What's the real challenge here for you?" This question helps people focus on their *real* problem, not the *first* problem.

When I use this question (both at work and home), I slow down and avoid offering instant solutions for the first problem I hear.

TAKEAWAY TIP: Don't assume that information reflects the real problem needing to be solved. The person you are working with may not know the real problem (or at least how to articulate it). Dig a little deeper when told a story related to a problem. Ask about the challenge instead of reacting to the story. This strategy helps you crack through the superficial shell and reach the real problem, allowing you to focus your problem-solving efforts where they count.

3. The Strategic Question:

Strategy is about finding and making winning choices. When FUEL was in its startup infancy, the owner of our company, Mike Wesner, used to say to me, "The quantity of your no's defines the quality of your yes's."

It made me think about strategy differently, and problem-solving requires strategy. Often, the most challenging question to master is: *If you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?*

I often wrestle with this question myself. Yet I know my clients and I cannot be effective problem-solvers when we are too busy to give essential tasks the time and attention they deserve. Excellence in problem-solving takes energy and clarity, so be sure to focus on what matters most.

TAKEAWAY TIP: To improve strategic problem-solving, slow down before adding tasks. The admission director can ask, "Will adding this work directly relate to helping my team achieve enrollment goals?" Admission counselors should consider, "Is this work critical to getting a student to apply, be accepted, or deposit?"

When pushed to take on more activities, we must recognize our willingness to say yes might be hindering the vital work that needs to be done. Saying no to non-critical tasks permits us to be more deliberate about our choices during our work hours and focus on solving the problems critical to the success of our teams, organizations, and bottom lines.

"The quantity of your no's defines the quality of your yes's."

— MIKE WESNER

4. The Learning Question:

When I was growing up, one of my favorite authors was Madeleine L'Engle. I was first introduced to her by my friend Dvora, who was an avid reader, even at the ripe old age of eight. I loved reading L'Engle's books because I learned about deep concepts like the fifth dimension in a way that a child could grasp. Reading her books entertained and taught me. One quote that always stuck with me is, "The minute we begin to think we have all the answers, we forget the questions."[4] I interpret that to mean it is crucial to hold onto curiosity because there is always more to know if you are open to learning—a philosophy I carry into the classroom when I serve as a faculty member and when consulting in the work world.

As you work through problem-solving, the main goal is often to get the solution so you can mark this off your to-do list. Here, I encourage leaders to use problem-solving as an opportunity to advance efficiency and improve work culture by creating a *learning environment*. One learning question linked to problem-solving skills is, "What was most useful to you?" Another alternative when teaching or training is asking, "What was your personal aha moment? And what is the one big thing you will take away to try or implement?"

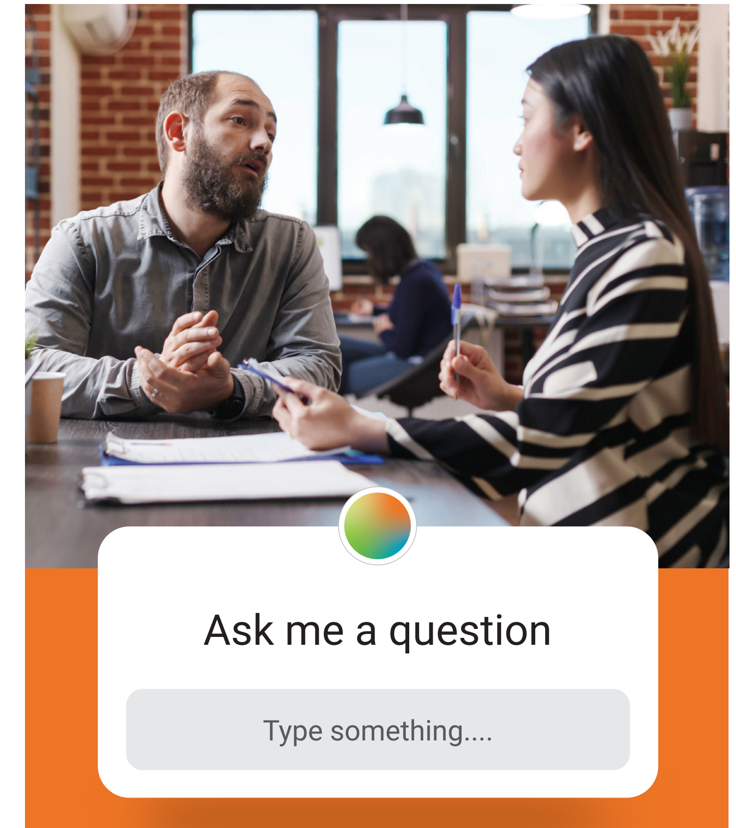
Michael Sanier, author of *The Coaching Habit*, is a big fan of using learning questions when problem-solving for four reasons. Learning questions: 1) Make it personal; 2) Give you feedback; 3) Keep the focus on learning, not judgment; and 4) Remind people how useful you are to them.[5]

TAKEAWAY TIP: Learning questions build bonds because they encourage collaborative working and back-and-forth exchanges. Along with guiding others to self-awareness, they also create an environment where people feel heard, valued, and respected.

Over the years, I have spent many hours learning and reading about problem-solving methods, and testing them in the real world. By focusing on questions, rather than advice, I have found that opportunities exists to get to the heart of the real problem. By being practiced in asking questions, digging to find the right questions to ask, and listening to others, we can all start solving the problems of the world.

4 Retrieved from: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/155720-the-minute-we-begin-to-think-we-have-all-the

5 Stanier, Michael Bungay. *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever*. Toronto: Box of Crayons Press. 2016.



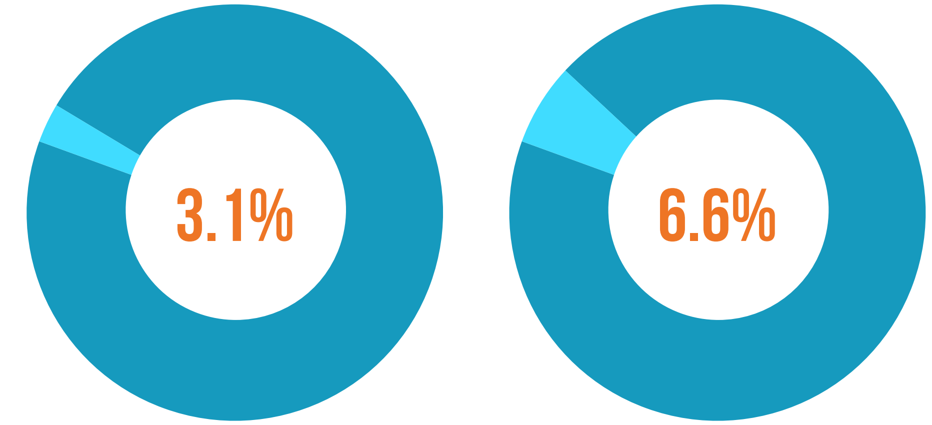
Dr. Jacquelyn D. Elliott is President of enrollmentFUEL. Over the years, she has developed strategies and trained and led teams at multiple campuses to record enrollments. She works with clients on Strategic Enrollment Management initiatives, and leads the company's consulting practice. Jacqui is passionate about professional development and architected enrollmentFUEL'S REV learning program, which focuses on providing training for enrollment professionals at all levels. If you have ideas you would like to see developed for training on your campus (or as a REV class), or for some great consulting tips, contact Jacqui at jacqui.elliott@enrollmentfuel.com.

CUSTOMIZE TO ACTUALIZE INCREASED ENROLLMENT: Marketing to Adult Learners

By Kimberly K. Estep, Ph.D.

MORE THAN 1 MILLION FEWER AMERICANS ARE ENROLLED IN COLLEGE THAN BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC BEGAN

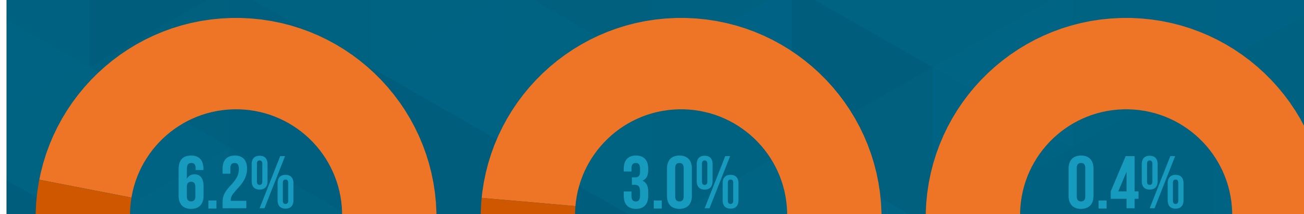
Decrease in National Undergraduate Enrollment



(or 456,300)
From Fall 2020 to Fall 2021

Since Fall of 2019

Decrease in Enrollment by Degree



Associate Degree Enrollment

Bachelor Degree Enrollment

Graduate Degree Enrollment

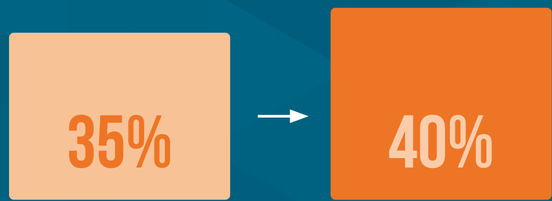
Enrollment specialists have known for a while what a recent report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) revealed: more than 1 million fewer Americans are enrolled in college than before the COVID-19 pandemic began.[1]

Released in January, the report on current term enrollments showed a decline of 3.1% (or 456,300) in national undergraduate enrollment from fall 2020 to fall 2021. Going back to fall of 2019, the decline in undergraduate enrollment is 6.6%.

These declines spanned across all degree levels. The number of students seeking associate degrees fell by 6.2% in one year; bachelor degree seekers fell by 3%; and graduate student enrollment declined 0.4%. Every state except Arizona, Colorado, New Hampshire, and South Carolina saw lower enrollment.

1 Retrieved from: https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/

Adult Learner Enrollment



Although adult learners make up 35%-40% of higher education enrollment, their numbers are dropping

According to the NSCRC, students 24 and older saw the sharpest relative enrollment decline last fall (3.4% or 210,800 students)

36 million Americans, most of whom are older than the traditional 18-22 age range, have some college credit but no degree

An Untapped Market

To help boost enrollment, many colleges and universities have ramped up efforts to attract adult learners. An estimated 36 million Americans, most of whom are older than the traditional 18-22 age range, have some college credit but no degree.

Although there is no singular definition of "adult learners," they are generally defined as adults 24 and older who have chosen to continue their educational pursuits. They fall into the broader category of "nontraditional students," which the National Center for Education Statistics defines as meeting at least one of the following seven criteria:[2]

- Delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school)
- Attends part time for at least part of the academic year
- Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled
- Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid
- Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others)
- Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents)
- Does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school)

Although adult learners make up 35%-40% of higher education enrollment, their numbers are dropping. According to the NSCRC, students 24 and older saw the sharpest relative enrollment decline last fall (3.4% or 210,800 students), largely driven by steep declines at four-year colleges.[3]

2 Retrieved from: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/97578e.asp

3 Retrieved from: https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/

Barriers Faced by Adult Learners

Western Governors University, the accredited online university I work for, was created by the Western Governors' Association 25 years ago to address workforce needs and expand access to affordable higher education. The average age of WGU undergraduates is 34.7, and the average age of our graduate students is 37.4. About 83% of our students work full time.

Marketing to adult learners is not as simple as promoting the financial benefits of a postsecondary degree. Even for those who have the desire to get a degree, many face multiple barriers to a quality education. For working adults, the first challenge is finding the time.

In professions highly impacted by the pandemic, like nursing, workers are doubly stressed. "Nurses are generally overtaxed with the pandemic, and our teams have lost the ability, because of the pandemic, to do high-touch marketing such as speaking with candidates in person at education fairs and in clinical sites," said Dr. Jan Jones-Schenck, Executive Dean and Senior Vice President of WGU's College of Health Professions. "Understandably, it is difficult to get nurses' attention when they are so overwhelmed with work and the other demands of their lives."[4]

Another barrier adult learners face is cost. According to Investopedia, nearly one-third of all American students incur debt to go to college. In 2020, the average student loan debt reached a record high of $38,792.[5]

Enrollment and financial aid professionals must work with adult learners to help them uncover as many financial aid resources as possible. In addition to scholarships and grants, this can include tuition assistance programs offered by employers. According to Statista.com, 56% of employers offered undergraduate and graduate tuition assistance in 2019.[6] Many employees are unaware of these programs and do not take advantage of this benefit.

As of 2016, employers can pay up to $5,250 annually to an employee for tuition assistance without the employee incurring income taxes on the benefit.

The pandemic elevated online learning into the public consciousness, and many institutions of higher learning pivoted to offering more classes online. While that helped adult learners who previously had to travel to attend in-person classes, it did not address the digital divide in our country. The Federal Communications Commission estimates that there are 21 million Americans without broadband access, while nonprofit Broadband Now estimates the real figure to be twice that at 42 million.[7]

Many adults who have college credit and who are eager to return to school suddenly face a roadblock when confronted with the issue of transferable credits. One college may accept all their credits, while another may accept only half, putting them further behind in their quest for a degree.

"As competition for students increases, especially among smaller colleges, we'll see mounting pressure to make transfers easier," said Julie Browne, MBA, who serves as the Marketing Manager at WGU. "I think we'll also see a dedicated focus on reverse transfers, awarding certificates and associate-degree credit to adult learners."[8]

Challenges of Attracting Adult Learners

Studies repeatedly show that adults with a college degree earn more than those with just a high school diploma. According to a new study by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW), associate degree holders earn a median of $2 million over their lifetime, compared to $1.6 million for high school graduates.[9] Those with bachelor's degrees will earn a median of $2.8 million over their lifetime.

Given the incentive of increased lifetime income, why aren't more adults pursuing postsecondary degrees? University of Virginia Professor Ben Castleman and his colleagues released a study on adults with college credit but no degree that provides some interesting insights.[10] Many adults don't reenroll for one of three primary reasons:

1. They are already earning a good salary and don't feel an "economic necessity" to go back to college.
2. They have so few credits that a degree seems out of reach.
3. They are working in a field where a degree wouldn't significantly increase their salary.

4 Jones-Schenck, Jan. Interview by author. Phone. Feb. 10, 2022.
5 Retrieved from: https://www.investopedia.com/student-loan-debt-2019-statistics-and-outlook-4772007
6 Retrieved from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/554081/percent-of-us-employers-offering-education-benefits/

7 Retrieved from: https://broadbandnow.com/research/fcc-underestimates-unserved-by-50-percent
8 Browne, Julie. Interview by author. Feb. 17, 2022.
9 Retrieved from: https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/cew-college_payoff_2021-fr.pdf
10 Bird, Kelli A., Castleman, Benjamin L., Fischer, Brett, and Skinner, Benjamin T., "Unfinished Business? Academic and Labor Market Profile of Adults with Substantial College Credits But No Degree," Sage Journals, January 24, 2022.

For many adults, the value proposition of increased earnings is not appealing enough to lure them back to college. Compounding the issue is an increased focus on college return on investment (ROI). With soaring tuition costs and increased student debt load, many believe that pursuing a college degree is not a worthwhile endeavor.

Georgetown's CEW developed an online tool with updated rankings of 4,500 colleges and universities based on new College Scorecard data. The Center also analyzed a new metric that measures the percentage of students at an institution whose earnings 10 years after enrollment are higher than those of high school graduates.

What they found is that at 1,233 postsecondary institutions (30% of all colleges studied), more than half of students are earning less than high school graduates 10 years after enrollment. The report received a significant amount of media coverage, with headlines like "More education doesn't always get you more money, report finds."[11]

"Aha!" proclaim the skeptics, pointing to the findings as proof that a college degree doesn't always produce a good ROI.

"College typically pays off, but the return on investment varies by credential, program of study, and institution," CEW Director Dr. Anthony P. Carnevale said in a press release. "It's important to inform people about the risk of taking out loans but not graduating, which could leave them without the increased earnings that would help them repay those loans."[12]

Marketing to Adults

The challenge of marketing a college degree to adults is that typical approaches won't work with such a large and diverse population. Castleman states outright that a "blanket approach" to recruiting adults to return to college isn't going to be efficient or productive. Instead, he advocates for a more targeted strategy aimed at those for whom a college education will make the most difference. He says it makes more sense to focus on subgroups like low earners.

WGU's marketing manager, Julie Browne, predicts that competition for adult learners, especially in the online space, will increase significantly in the coming years. She also foresees that colleges that fail to attract their share of adult learners will falter, leading to closures and acquisitions. Messaging to adults will be key.

11 Retrieved fromL https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/13/more-education-doesnt-always-get-you-more-money-report-finds.html#:~:text=Roughly%2016%25%20of%20high%20school,gender%2C%20a%20new%20report%20finds.

12 Retrieved from: https://news.yahoo.com/new-database-ranks-4500-us-colleges-by-return-on-investment-155443063.html

"Affordability is over-messaged and is a relative term to this diverse audience," said Browne. "Instead, we need to show the career benefit of the degree program and work with industry leaders to develop curriculum that will prepare workers."

Successful Campaigns

Creative tactics can be deployed not only to attract adult learners, but to keep them enrolled. Here are a few examples of promising campaigns and initiatives.

Scholarships that target the unique financial needs of adult learners show promise. To support low-income adults without access to broadband internet, Western Governors University created Online Access Scholarships that cover the cost of installation and monthly fees for internet access. In remote rural areas, this could include paying to install the necessary satellite equipment on a home. Scholarship recipients also receive a refurbished laptop complete with a webcam.

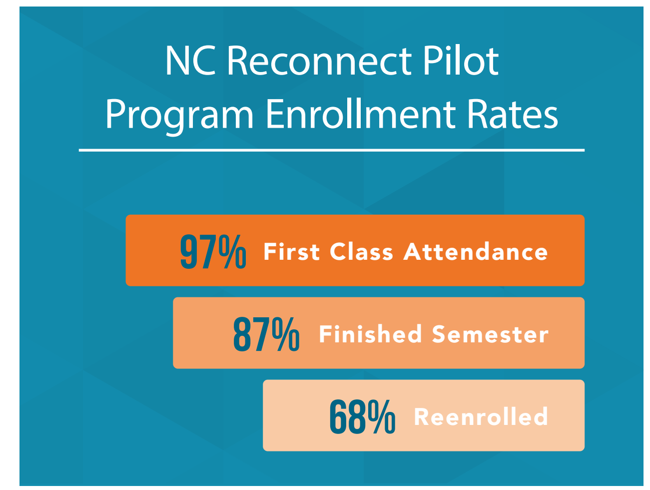
More than 2,757 individuals have applied for—and more than 1,400 have received—this scholarship, which removes a significant barrier for many motivated adults who wish to pursue an online degree.

Social media ad buys are still in play and provide immediate trackability, but a targeted approach promoting specific degree programs to specific populations is better than just running general branding ads. Prospective adult students are barraged with display ads from a variety of colleges and universities, so a specific message that emphasizes return on investment will stand out.

Another promising tactic is geotargeting, which serves up specific online content on smartphones and connected devices to audiences based on their geolocation. For instance, you could geotarget specific events like college fairs or facilities like major employers in your area. At WGU, we have seen early success in aligning our geotargeting spend with our recruitment activities on the ground.

In my home state of Tennessee, Castleman and his team have been working with the Board of Regents to boost enrollment and retention at Tennessee community colleges, which saw 12% fewer adults 25 and older enrolled between fall 2019 and fall 2020. This is despite the fact that the Tennessee Reconnect program provides free tuition to adults.

With input from experts, the community college system redesigned communications to more clearly explain Reconnect rules and processes. Now, information like the need to reapply for the grant each year, and the requirement to carry at least six credits at a time to stay continuously enrolled, is going out in text messages, via faculty members, and in letters from college presidents to students. The community college system has also launched a new peer-mentoring program that is showing initial success in keeping adults enrolled.



In North Carolina, the North Carolina Reconnect program was piloted at five community colleges and will be expanded to five more. Studies showed that 22% of North Carolinians aged 25-44 had some college credit but no degree (more than 600,000 adults). The pilot program targeted adults 25 and older who attended community college within the last five years but then dropped out.[13]

13 Retrieved from https://businessnc.com/n-c-community-colleges-show-success-in-aiding-adult-learners/

Through direct communications, the five community colleges convinced 753 adults to register for classes. Administrators at the individual schools used customized approaches that addressed specific local needs. Some creative programs to retain adult students included pairing them with success coaches, providing nontraditional student aid like funds for childcare and car repairs, writing personal letters to each dropout, creating an adult learning center with special intake forms and information about debt forgiveness, training more transcript evaluators, and staffing enrollment offices on weekends when working adults could call or visit.

Of the 753 adults who registered as part of the pilot program, 97% showed up for their first class. Of those, 87% made it to the end of the semester. Out of those, 68% either completed their credential or reenrolled for the following semester, comparable to the 67% reenrollment rate systemwide.[14]

Seeing these and other positive results proves it is possible to reach adult audiences with the right value proposition. Those who have made up their minds that a college degree isn't for them may not be convinced, but a large portion of adults with some college and no degree might just need the right targeted message, the right encouragement, the right resources, and the right support to earn their degree.

It may seem trite to say colleges can attract more adult learners by "working smarter, not harder," but targeted, customized approaches are key to reaching such a large, diverse population and actualizing enrollment gains. Are you up to the challenge?

14 Ibid.

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MAY THE WOOKIEE SPEAK TO YOU!

By Gerald Stanley, B.S.

For the past 40 years, a fictional Wookiee character has captured the imagination of *Star Wars* fans as the mighty, lovable, and loyal sidekick to Han Solo. What is the appeal of a character who does not speak a language that the audience can understand? How do we understand him? What is he saying? Somehow, we all know—even without speaking Shyriiwook (also known as Wookieespeak) what is being communicated.

Chewbacca, Chewy, Fuzzball…what he does on the big screen is genius, and he teaches us how we can understand data. Wait—what?

I submit that there are three distinct ways we fully understand Chewbacca. Not only do we understand him, but his personality and depth of communication draw us to befriend him. These communication methods are just as applicable to understanding data as they are to understanding Wookieespeak.

Chewbacca's *historical behavior* is a strong predictor of how he will act in future episodes. We understand, from history, that Han and Chewy have a strong, brotherly relationship. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Chewbacca gets a kick out of Princess Leia calling Han a "Laser Brain." Han's iconic and classic response was, "Laugh it up, fuzzball." This exchange is funny, brotherly, and affectionate. So when Han Solo, brother and friend, is killed by Kylo Ren in *The Force Awakens*, we immediately know how Chewbacca will react: sadness, anger, and revenge.

In the story, Chewbacca's reaction seems obvious, and the same parallel can be drawn between historical and new data. In enrollment management, historical data can be used to set the stage for future outcomes and predictions. Data has the power to provide insights on how your prospective students might react to a given action. For example, from a pool of prospects, who are the top 100 candidates likely to move through the funnel if they visit the campus, fill out the FAFSA, and talk to the department chair?

History can give us insights into future outcomes, but history doesn't stand alone.

The Last Jedi boasts one of the funniest scenes in all of *Star Wars*. Chewbacca sits down by a fire in the evening, ready to partake of his dinner. Holding a freshly roasted Porg (basically a bird) in his hand, Chewbacca hesitates to take that first bite. Nearby, the other living Porgs stare at Chewbacca with deep, saddened eyes because their buddy has just been roasted for dinner, and they can't bear the thought of him being eaten. Chewbacca communicates exasperation and remorse because he's hungry, but he feels like he morally or ethically shouldn't eat the Porg.

Context clues (hunger, dinner, warm fire, fresh meat, sad Porgs, Chewbacca's gestures, etc.) surrounding the scene lead us to a humorous conclusion. The same methodology, called correlations, can be used in the world of data.

Enrollment professionals have manually used context for years when evaluating enrollment data. For instance, when considering a set of variables like FAFSA filing, campus visits, legacy, or distance to campus, a broader conclusion can be drawn about a prospect's intent, interest, or propensity to enroll.

However, what if there was a more comprehensive method to evaluate context?

Instead of making broad correlations with humanly comprehensible data points, how about utilizing correlation algorithms to find not so obvious context clues? One of the first steps of implementing predictive models is to consider correlating variables for a specific target (such as identifying prospects likely to fill out an application). These correlating variables are fed into the predictive models, and then probability scores are generated. However, these context clues can also be used for business cases.

For instance, math scores, high school size, or a department chair interview might be the variables that give context clues indicating the likelihood an engineering prospect will pay a matriculation fee. Of those three variables, one variable can lead to an actionable step for the enrollment professional to pursue, which will increase the likelihood an engineering student will move to the next stage.

Context helped us uncover Chewbacca's exasperation and remorse over dinner; however, sometimes we need a helper. Han Solo is another key to understanding Chewbacca.

In *The Force Awakens*, while embarking on a mission to take down the Starkiller Base, our heroes Finn, Han Solo, and Chewbacca find themselves outside the base in a snowy blizzard. Chewbacca stands guard, looking for threats, while Han and Finn get into an argument. At the end of the argument, Chewbacca delivers a message, but we have no idea what he is saying. Is he annoyed at the argument? Is someone coming? Han Solo assists with comprehension by asking Chewbacca, "Oh really, you're cold?" Our lovable Wookiee needs a jacket like the rest of us. Without Han Solo's assistance, Chewbacca's communication would have remained a mystery.

It's the same with data. Having the *right people* assist with data is paramount to assessing, capturing, and analyzing it before informing enrollment teams what the data is saying. At many institutions, an Institutional Research (IR) professional or department is available to help an enrollment team understand the data. Or the enrollment team at a larger institution may have the budget to hire a full-time business analyst or data scientist. Another option is to seek out independent consultants or organizations specializing in analytics. This option can be the most cost-effective as these organizations have typically refined their processes.

In the movies, the Force was never used to interpret Chewbacca, and you don't have to have supernatural, mystical power to interpret enrollment data. However, you do need to take intentional steps to gather historical data, find correlations and context clues, and derive meaning. Unless, of course, you possess the proverbial gift of speaking the "language" like Han.

So how are Chewbacca's three "interpretation methods" implemented in the real world?

At a small Midwestern university, these data analysis methods were used to increase recruiting effectiveness. The institution used predictions to target specific markets before purchasing names. As expected, improving the targeted set of markets increased the number of quality applicants while lowering costs. Another Midwestern institution of similar size utilized correlating variables to understand how a specific predictive model employed "packaged dollars" to indicate action. The institution used that variable to build prescriptive models, which informed them on how to improve the strategic distribution of scholarship and gap dollars, equating to an increase in the number of full-time students while distributing the same dollars from previous years.

Enrollment wins are just around the corner for your enrollment team. When you're ready to implement enrollment strategies utilizing data, I hope you can hear Han Solo say, "May the Wookiee speak to you!"

Data Exploration for Student Success

United Kingdom-based researchers Carly Foster and Dr. Peter Francis study educational analytics. Foster and Francis looked at how data is used. They defined five areas beyond recruiting where institutions can use **Educational Data Mining (EDM)** to report, monitor, identify patterns, and generate insights linked to improving student success outcomes:[1]

Student Outcomes: Institutional efforts driven by data to improve retention, achievement, and student engagement

Learning Analytics: The generation of targeted personal, pastoral, wellbeing, or other support interventions delivered by academic or professional support staff through the application of EDM

Academic Analytics: Data used for academic interventions, such as changes to course or curricula design, assessment and feedback, pedagogies, or other learning and teaching enhancement activities

Learner Analytics: The direct-to-student communication and visualization of personalized data and insights derived from the EDM process to positively influence learning behavior

Academic and Professional Support Interventions: Coordinated institution-led initiatives designed and delivered using insight from educational analytics, targeted at students to influence behavior and performance for successful outcomes

1 Foster, Carly and Frances, Peter. "A systemic review on the deployment and effectiveness of data analytics in higher education to improve student outcomes." Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education. Vol. 45, No. 6 (2022): 822-841.

Gerald Stanley has been successfully building data solutions for the past 20 years. He is now CEO and Lead Developer for Inroads Analytics, where he applies his passion for technology to advancing higher education. His aim is to enable data-informed teams that consistently translate strategic insights into enrollment wins. Contact Gerald at gstanley@inroadsanalytics.com.

YOU SHOULD NEVER ASK THIS QUESTION

By Jeremy Tiers, B.A.

Depending on how you phrase questions to prospective students, you're either going to get no answer, the "right" answer (aka the answer they think they're supposed to give you), or an insightful answer packed with valuable context and insights. While we all want—and need—context and insight to help guide students down a choice path, I often find many admissions counselors, tour guides, and student callers ask vanilla questions, including what is arguably the worst question of all: ***"Do you have any questions?"*** A variation comes from making generic statements like, "Reach out to me if you have any questions."

Whether you ask the question or make the statement, vanilla approaches rarely lead to productive and helpful conversations, because they are too open-ended to give students a starting point for real engagement.

Regardless of stage or grade, experience tells me all students have questions and topics they would like to explore. Ultimately, their fear of not knowing what to ask, or of worrying they will say something that might be perceived as silly prevents them from opening themselves up for exposure. Yet, to truly help, you need to understand what is going on in their heads.

The solution to this problem is simple: Be direct and intentional whenever you ask a question or make a statement. Prospective students are fine with this approach because they expect you, the admission expert, to provide direction for their wayfinding conversations.

Before asking a question, a good rule of thumb is to start by defining what you hope to learn. Pinpoint a conversational goal and then develop the necessary question (or questions) to achieve it. No matter what the situation—high school visits, college fairs, campus visits, virtual events, phone calls, or emails and texts messages—you can home in on what you want to know by stating what you want to achieve and understand.

Here's a quick, practical example. For inquiries who have not applied, your goal could be understanding why they haven't taken the next step.

Instead of ending either a message or a conversation with, "Feel free to email or call me with questions," ask, "Can you tell me the number one thing that's keeping you from starting your application?"

This question works on three levels. It is intentional and strategically aligns with your goal, which is persuading the inquiry to apply. It is direct, which makes it easy for the student to understand. And, since the question is specific, the student will most likely give you a specific answer, which will give you context for further action.

Along those lines, here are a few other direct questions to consider asking inquiries as well as juniors who visit your campus this spring and summer:

- What does the perfect college look like in your mind?
- What's something you think makes one college better than the rest?
- What's one thing your future college absolutely has to have?
- What kind of schools have you already crossed off your list?
- What's the biggest question mark you have about <College Name>?
- When you think about being a college freshman, what worries you the most?
- How can I make your college search easier?

Once a student has been admitted, your focus should turn to figuring out how and when they plan to make their decision. These questions help to accomplish that:

- What's changed the most for you since you started this whole process?"
- What advice are you getting from your parents (or friends) at this point?
- If you end up choosing another school, what do you think the number one reason will be that you don't pick us?
- If it comes down to <College Name> and another school, and you have to break a tie, how will you do that?
- What do you have left to do before you're going to make your decision?
- When do you see yourself making a decision?

In addition to being direct, these questions use a casual tone. They include words like "you" and "your." Those words, combined with a student's name, make questions feel personal.

Besides knowing what kinds of questions to ask at various stages of the college search, it's just as important to understand how to build on the engagement and feedback you receive by asking follow-up questions. The goal for this category of investigative questions is digging deeper to uncover the why, when, or how behind the student's expressed thinking.

Interestingly enough, many counselors and recruiters tell me they typically *don't* ask many follow-up questions because they don't want to come across as pushy. Remember, students don't perceive you as pushy when you're focusing on their needs, and are genuinely interested in learning more about them.

Here are two follow-up questions and two exploratory statements that work well in a number of different situations:

- Why is that important to you?
- What does that mean?
- Help me understand why you feel that way.
- Talk to me more about that.

Asking the right kinds of initial and follow-up questions is an essential skill, and one the best recruiters and counselors consistently practice. Start by knowing your communication goal. Be intentional about asking questions to help you achieve it. Promote an open exchange by keeping the tone of conversations casual, and demonstrate genuine interest in understanding, so students feel they are in a supportive environment where they can ask anything without being judged.

If you find yourself struggling to be direct and intentional, or if you could use some help coming up with a better question, go ahead and email me for some quick, free advice.

The work you do is important, and best wishes for success.

Jeremy Tiers, B.A., is the Senior Director of Admissions Service for Tudor Collegiate Strategies, a Higher Ed partner that helps colleges and universities grow enrollment through staff training workshops and personalized, engaging communication plans. Find more articles like this one or sign up for his weekly newsletter at admissions.dantudor.com.

MUSINGS OF TWO

FIRST-YEAR ADMISSION ADVISORS

By Victoria Beck, B.A. and Tiffany Hines, B.S.

VICTORIA'S VIEW

The Admissions Funnel, FTIC, and CRM sounded like a foreign language to Tiffany and me on our first day at Piedmont University. We started on the same day, both new to the world of higher education. Beginning together allowed us to lean on each other throughout the process. Along with learning from our supervisors and co-workers, we got the extra benefit of peer-based learning.

Tiffany and I participated in enrollementFUEL's REV Training for new Admission Counselors, which taught the ins and outs of the admissions cycle. The "funnel" was mentioned in both our office training and our REV training. It is crucial to the admissions process and essential to successful recruiting at one's institution. The design and name reminded Tiffany of funnel cake; thus, there were jokes that we deserved a funnel cake every time the funnel was mentioned. Fast forward a few months, and we went to our local county fair and shared a funnel cake.

You can watch videos, read articles, and learn from others, but nothing compares to life experiences. Although Tiffany and I have less than a year in our field, the amount of knowledge accumulated in this short period was greater than expected. From travel season to admissions events to day-to-day tasks, together we have learned what it's like to be first-time, first-year Admissions Advisors.

TIFFANY'S VIEW

My territory comprises diverse counties stretching from rural Georgia to some Metro Atlanta areas. I was surprised by the amount of networking I do within my territory. At events, I constantly see familiar faces, including other recruiters, and enjoy chatting about their experiences. The most significant part of networking is connecting with teachers and counselors of high schools within my territory. I admit it is comforting once you have established those relationships.

It is equally important to connect with the students and their families. When meeting with tours, I constantly look for new ways to connect with families, and work to keep my institution memorable. I have been pleasantly surprised by the sheer number of people I have met or have been in contact with thus far—there is great value in having these connections. This job works best when you are allied with others, and I look forward to meeting new people and reconnecting with those I have already met.

If your goal is working in higher education, one of the best places to start is as an Admissions Advisor or Admission Counselor. While there is pressure, there is also fulfillment because you are helping students make the right choices for their lives and career goals. Victoria Beck and Tiffany Hines are Admissions Advisors at Piedmont University in Demorest, Georgia. They learned on the job during their first year, met the challenges accompanying goals and deadlines, and experienced the positive moments sparked by human interaction.

VICTORIA'S VIEW

Forty-eight states, including the topmost geographical counties in Georgia—that's my territory. When I share this information with others, their eyes typically widen. The first week in admissions, mine did as well. I had little background information on what it takes to be an advisor and was surprised to discover I would be traveling a little further than I had imagined. Fortunately, I started in my new role a few months before it was time to hit the road, which gave me plenty of time to quiz veteran advisors for advice. During the past travel season, my primary focus was on the states near Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia.

As a North Carolina native, having the Carolinas in my territory was a happy connection with my roots. My first week of solo travel took me to Asheville, North Carolina. I grew up close to that city, so it was a perfect way to jump into the travel aspect of an Admissions Advisor's life. Since I chose to attend a small out-of-state institution as a college student, I can empathize with my out-of-state students as they explore whether this experience will be right for them. After completing multiple fall and spring trips, I am reminded of how much enjoyment my job brings every time I set up a table for a visit or a college fair. While life on the road is a little different than I expected, it quickly became one of my favorite aspects of the job.

OUR COLLECTIVE VIEW

To be successful while working in admissions, you need balance, even while offering students ease of access to you as a resource. That can be challenging because work can arrive at any moment via our phones. To be successful yet not overwhelmed, we need to respect personal time and silence our work emails once the day is complete. After all, we wouldn't expect to call our doctor's office at 10 p.m. with a non-emergency or reach a staff member at that late hour.

Admissions Advisors should consider other ways to make workdays less stressful. For example, don't be afraid to take time between events to explore the area. Take your work outside. Try local coffee shops and restaurants. As a bonus, these activities will help you create talking points when communicating with students and families within the area.

Using time between events in a positive way is beneficial for conversations during visits, and it makes us more productive when we go back to work. The goal is to feel refreshed rather than stressed. Co-workers, counselors, and families notice moods, so it's important to be positive.

For us, learning to find balance has made a tremendous difference. The best Admissions Advisors genuinely care about their students and their success. Getting to know them is easier said than done—especially when applications keep rolling in—but it makes a world of difference. And one or two conversations with a student could be the difference that separates your school from another school. Reaching out to students with more than just deadline reminders is also vital; yes, deadlines are important, but checking in to see how their senior year is going will make you more approachable and relatable. We are recent college graduates, so we find it easy to connect with students because the age gap is small. However, even seasoned professionals can stay current by asking their students simple questions to spark conversation and let them know you care.

We can imagine veterans in this field have many "feel-good" moments when they look back with great joy and remember students who have left a positive imprint upon their lives. By helping someone attain a goal, we are energized and motivated to work a little harder. As we reflected on our first seven months in this field, this moment was one we wanted to share.

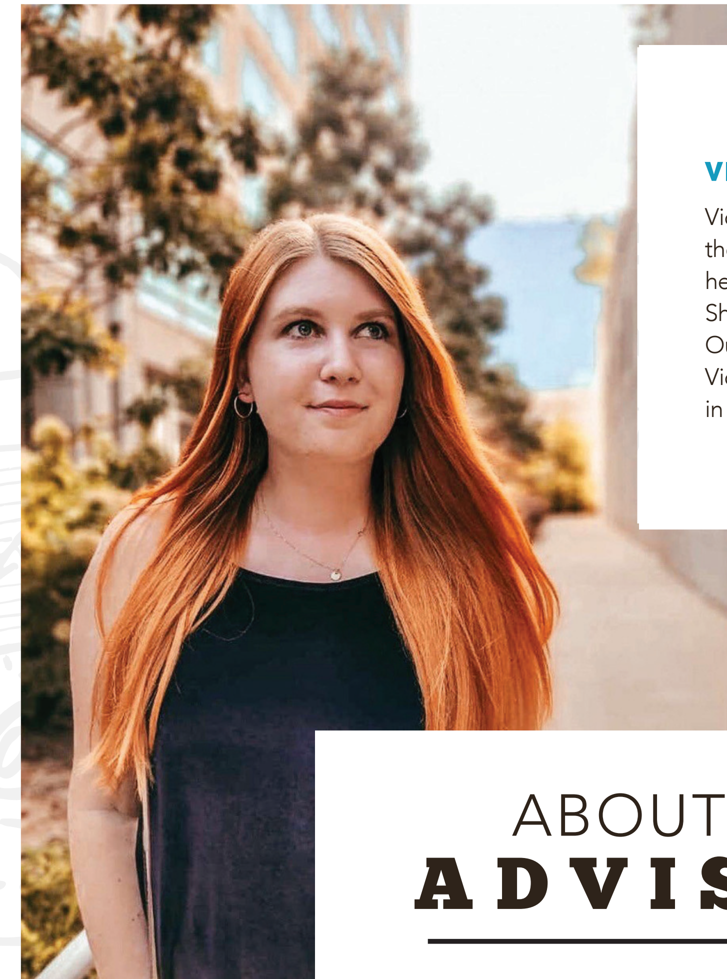
A student's father called the office asking for Tiffany, and it was easy to feel the excitement oozing from him. He wanted to speak with the person who told his daughter that she had been accepted to the university of her choice. The young lady was the first one in her family to have the privilege of attending college. Her proud dad spoke about how dedicated his daughter had been during her high school career. He shared how he believed those in the recruiting field made a difference in the lives of high school students, giving them hope for a future they didn't realize they could have.

For that proud dad, his daughter's acceptance to Piedmont was a memory-making moment. The whole family knew Tiffany by name because the student had always shared their messages. Having these personal connections with families and students in this field is vital to success. There is something special about that family who showed such excitement about their student attending the institution of their choice—an institution we are privileged to call our workplace.

Those "feel-good" moments make you realize you are doing something worthy. We entered the world of higher education to make an active difference in students' lives. Ideally, we want them to attend Piedmont University, but if, along the way, we help them to decide to continue their education in general, that is also important. Education is an empowering thing, and something that can never be taken away from an individual. We do our jobs to impact students' lives and believe it should be the goal for everyone in the field.

Once, while doing a high school visit in North Georgia, a student came up with a handwritten thank you card addressed right on the envelope to "Victoria." The student had visited campus and thanked everyone who had helped make her campus tour at Piedmont possible. That simple note was powerful. Though we were just doing our job when she visited campus, this moment meant much more to the student. As Admissions Advisors, we cross paths with hundreds, even thousands of students. In most cases, we never know the significance of our impact on a students' life. But occasionally, there is something—a call, a note, or a conversation—that proves how important our jobs truly are.

We are far from experts, and many readers of this article know much more than us. However, we bring fresh eyes to the world of admissions. Being an admissions professional is more challenging than most people believe. However, it is also a rewarding field too. In less than a year in our positions, we have seen many different aspects of the job, and we are thankful to work at an institution on a mission to create strong leaders for the world. We believe in the community and culture, which makes selling our institution easier. We have learned (and are still learning) from our bosses and co-workers, who have generously offered guidance and advice. We remain grateful for go-to people who patiently answer what sometimes seems to be a million questions in a day. We can't thank these supporters enough. Both of us are passionate about admissions and Piedmont, and we care about our students. That's why we believe we have been successful to date and strive to continue our success.



VICTORIA BECK

Victoria grew up in the small town of Hayesville, located in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in History from Young Harris College. Shortly after graduation, she accepted the position of an Out-of-State Admissions Advisor at Piedmont University. Victoria also plans to pursue a master's degree in education in the future. Contact Victoria at vbeck@piedmont.edu.

ABOUT OUR ADVISORS

TIFFANY HINES

Tiffany Hines is an Ohio native. After six years of interpreting American Sign Language for the Ohio Deaf Community, she and her husband moved to Gainesville, GA. Tiffany earned her Associates degree in Deaf Studies and Interpreting from Ohio University and received her Bachelor of Science in Communications Studies from Ohio University, and she now works at Piedmont University as an Admissions Advisor. Contact Tiffany at thines@piedmont.edu.

MAINTAINING SEO DURING A WEBSITE REDESIGN

By Rory Green, B.A.

Here's a situation that will probably sound familiar to many people in higher ed:

You've got a new website designed. It looks great, and it seems like it should do the job you need it to do. Then, in a monthly meeting, you hear about a troublesome trend. You're losing ground on multiple, critical keywords—right when you need to be firing on every cylinder to hit your goals.

How did that happen? And, more importantly, how can you fix it and make sure it doesn't happen again?

It's all about Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

THE PROBLEM WITH ASSUMPTIONS

In many cases, web developers do not automatically take SEO into account when working on a site redesign. Perhaps it's not their area of expertise, or you didn't ask (or they didn't ask). Even when the subject of SEO has been brought up and considered, you may see a drop in traffic.

Indexing may be the culprit. According to Semrush, "indexability" refers to the ability of a search engine, like Google, to access, analyze, and add a page to its index, or the information that it uses to respond to user queries.[1] Among the factors that influence how well (or not) a search engine can index your site are two crucial ones that are often disrupted during a redesign: site structure and internal link structure.

Site structure and link structure are closely entwined. Put together, they can either make it super easy for crawlers to find, analyze, and index your site, or they can make it difficult, lowering your ranking.

When your site is undergoing a redesign, it's possible it may be getting a new structure and new links. This temporarily makes the indexing process more of a challenge. For this reason, it's a good rule of thumb to not launch a new site during peak visitor season, since every visitor counts.

PLAN TO SUCCEED

A legacy website for a college or university can easily have as many as 1,500 pages. This is especially true when departments have control over adding their own content. Redesigning a website of this scale can be daunting, especially if SEO wasn't consistent or wasn't a priority when the content was initially created.

Because of this, it's important to address SEO early on in the redesign process. Determine what you need to save from the old content and what no longer serves a useful purpose on the new site. As you plan out the redesign, think through how the new design will affect SEO.

In the course of a website redesign, you may find yourself changing the URLs of some pages. Perhaps you're trying to better target keywords within the URLs themselves, or

1 Retrieved from: https://www.semrush.com/blog/what-are-crawlability-and-indexability-of-a-website/.

Which pages are performing best?

Which pages are performing worst?

Are there any pages with duplicate or closely-related content?

Can any pages be combined into one, stronger page?

Where are redirects needed?

you're creating a more consistent URL format for the whole site. Whatever the reason, it's going to affect SEO.

When changing URLs, it's important to also change the links that lead to those pages.

A 2021 Semrush study of 150,000 websites (175 million individual pages) found that over 42% of websites have broken internal links.[2] Those are all missed opportunities—and they're all hurting your link equity, crawlability, indexability, and overall ranking.

Instead, ensure that links are correct and that redirects are in place as needed. More on that in a moment.

Before getting started on the full-scale redesign, do an SEO audit of your existing site. Ask questions like:

- Which pages are performing best?
- Which pages are performing worst?
- Are there any pages with duplicate or closely-related content?
- Can any pages be combined into one, stronger page?
- Where are redirects needed?

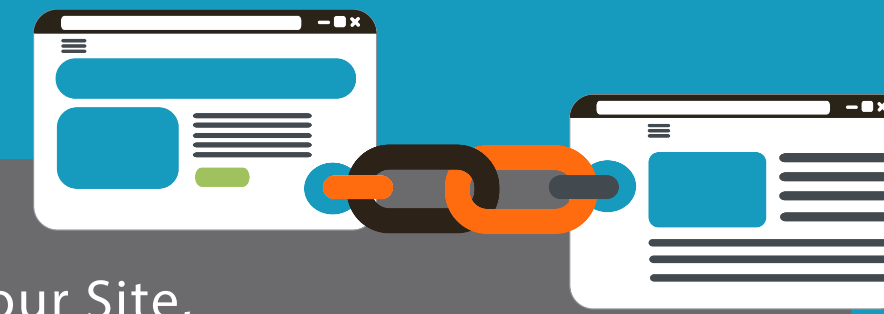
As part of this audit, you will probably find some pages that need to be removed. Whether the actual content is completely removed or simply merged into another page, recognize that removing pages can impact rankings, and be prepared for that. Part of the plan also should include a redesign of any navigation bars, drop-down menus, and other site structure elements.

Document and catalog everything before you start your build. In particular, take note of your website information architecture and decide how to structure it going forward. Developing uniform naming conventions can help keep your site better organized and more readable. Related links and metadata are also key elements of SEO strategy, offering more ways for crawlers to accurately analyze your pages. It's these kinds of details that separate an "OK" SEO strategy from a great one.

Redirects are an inevitable part of this strategy, especially when overhauling URL naming conventions. In essence, a redirect is a way of moving users from a given URL to another, especially in cases where the original no longer exists. Think of it like a forwarding mechanism, or a digital detour. It means that, when you remove a page, change its URL, and/or merge it with another page, someone who clicks on a link to that now-removed URL will still land on the page you want them to see, rather than an error.

Why are redirects so important? For one thing, they matter to the user experience; running into repeated

2 Retrieved from: https://www.semrush.com/blog/most-common-internal-link-building-mistakes/.



Not Rebuilding Your Site, But Want to Improve SEO?

Look at your backlinks, also called referring domains. When another domain references your site, search engines assume it is because your site is credible, and the content is relevant and authoritative.

The more backlinks you have, particularly when they are from reputable, high-ranking sites, the better off you are. Even if you are not rebuilding your website, a backlink audit will pay off.

Software is required to determine all the links pointing to your website. If you do not have this capability in-house, find an SEO-savvy partner. Once you have identified the links, review them to ensure they are reputable.

If any backlinks are considered undesirable or irrelevant, tag them as a "no follow" link.

On a redesign, look for new backlinks to add. If you have outside authors for posts or related information, verify their credentials to be sure notable work is identified on the new redesign.

errors and being unable to access content drives readers away. For another, errors can tank your rankings. If a page returns an error code, search engine crawl bots will quickly drop it from its index, backlinks to the missing page will no longer count, and you'll lose all the ranking benefits you've acquired. Implementing clean, easy redirects solves this problem.

During the process, you'll need to map your URLs. Figure out what you have now, what you'll have when your redesign is done, and where they should go. Consider what's actually on those pages, too. Which pages have ranking keywords? Which pages are currently driving top traffic? Consider also if you have pages with backlinks. SEO service Moz describes backlinks, or links from one site to another, as a "vote of confidence."[3] If your site has backlinks, it means that another site out there has linked to your page. The more backlinks you have (particularly from reputable, high-ranking sites themselves), the better off you are.

The redesign process doesn't have to be a total overhaul. If you already have good rankings, minimizing changes to page layouts helps maintain them. After all, you don't want Google to think you have a brand-new site because the content, metadata, links, URLs, and other aspects all changed at once. Instead, build a smart redesign strategy that minimizes disruptions while upgrading your content and SEO, and you'll win every time.

3. Retrieved from: https://moz.com/learn/seo/backlinks.

Rory Green, B.A., serves in a lead position on enrollmentFUEL's marketing operations team, actively working on SEO projects for clients and for FUEL's internal initiatives. He has over 15 years of experience in programming, website development, and SEO. Contact Rory at rory.green@enrollmentfuel.com.

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Amplify your message at all stages of the recruitment funnel. Your enrollmentFUEL team helps you select the right mix of household-targeted display ads, social media ads, geographical fencing, Connected TV commercials, Google PPC ads, look-alike modeling, influencer marketing and more.

Forensic Lead Generation™

Spot digital fingerprints, uncover clues to identify stealth inquiries, and uncover new leads. If you are looking for innovative ways to reach your recruiting goals, talk to the forward thinkers at FUEL about this technology-based solution.

Complimentary Multi-Point Digital Marketing Assessment

SCAN TO GET YOURS

Slate Consulting

Implement or optimize your Slate instance with expert help from enrollmentFUEL. We are here to help with your Slate to-do list: upgrade your student status page, audit your system, fine-tune your communication plan, establish behavioral scores to identify top prospects, and more. Whatever is on your list, we're here to help!

Financial Aid Consulting Solutions

Increase net revenues, streamline processes, and improve results. Transformational strategies to compete and meet goals.

GIVE RECRUITMENT MARKETING A BOOST WITH FRESH THINKING FROM FUEL

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