Tips to Increase Enrollment

by Joe Sallustio │ Mar 18, 2021 1:45pm

(Getty Images)

Colleges and universities have taken a hit on the enrollment front this past year. To regain ground, enrollment marketers need actionable solutions that can be operationalized with focus, effort and the desire to meet or exceed goals. Assuming operations in university enrollment departments look fairly similar year over year, and enrollment budgets have either remained flat or increased, marketing and enrollment professionals are under tremendous pressure step up and show tangible ROI. These pressures are enough to make higher education marketers uneasy, and it could eventually lead to turnover and job uncertainty.

With institutional goals set high, how can marketers prove their worth in 2021, maintain their job stability and raise enrollment numbers? These two solutions—each with a simple approach, along with an advanced tip—can help them quickly move to meet their metrics in challenging times.

Simple Solution #1: Rethink the Application Process

process may frustrate them enough to "X" out of the application before finishing it, it may make you rethink exactly why you're commanding all of the information that you are up front.

Collecting a student's information is really a step-by-step process for you to meet the student amid the buying process. A request for information (RFI) form on your website is the initial stage of the process, where you capture the students who want to inquire, but who aren't quite ready to apply. Maybe they are at work and only have a few minutes, and a lengthy form is going to dissuade them from even doing that. All that is needed in this scenario is their name, email and, optionally, a phone number.

The online application should then be used as an extended RFI form that solicits other essential information, such as completed degree level, degree of interest, whether the student is a veteran or active military member, or other absolutely essential information to qualify them slightly beyond the RFI. Once, completed, the student should be alerted to the status with an automated response along the lines of, "Thank you for submitting your online application. Someone from the enrollment team will be in touch shortly to review your interest and collect any other necessary information."

It's then the enrollment professional's role to fill in any information gaps when they make contact with the applicant. Simply put, the online application should not be field upon field of data dumping that the student is required or even encouraged to complete. I've seen first-hand that application numbers significantly increase when the online application is used as a strategic tool, rather than an electronic version of paper form.

Advanced Tip: Is your technology sophisticated enough to track the number of people who began the online application and closed out before completion? If you track this percentage, you should be able to prove out that reducing the number of fields will reduce your incomplete application percentage.

Simple Solution #2: Improve Financial Aid Packaging Speed

Education is a significant investment for students and their families who are essentially education consumers. When you look at education on par with other significant financial purchases that we make in our lifetimes, such as a house or a car, the necessity of financial understanding is the most critical component beyond initial interest. When investing in a house, people check with their mortgage broker from the onset to understand what they can afford within their budget. When buying a car, customers are shepherded right from the sales desk to the financing office before they even leave the dealership. Why? No one wants to make a major investment, and won't, until they fully understand the cost.

Higher education has consistently failed to provide the same level of customer experience, despite knowing that, if another school does, the likelihood of losing a would-be student is all but guaranteed.

The solution to improving the enrollment experience lies in measuring financial aid packaging speed. How long does it take a student to become familiar with the financing details of their intended purchase from their time of application? Does it take 24 hours? 48 hours? Longer? Every administrator should be keenly aware that a growing number of institutions are measuring affordability-based yield. The yield from applicant-to-student is measured as a percentage, both including financial aid completion and without financial aid completion. Schools can then put measures in place to ensure financial aid packaging happens quicker, and with incredible customer service to back it up. Financial aid professionals should be the barometer from which you measure your institutional customer service experience—they have the power (whether they like it or not) to directly impact the enrollment decision.

Efficiency in enrollment activity is found through data collection. Measuring response times at all points in the enrollment process is an important part of driving operational efficiency. For institutions struggling with enrollment, one of the first questions that needs to be asked is, "How long does it take for the enrollment team to reach out to a potential student?" If the answer to this question is anything beyond "minutes," the opportunity to increase enrollments without increasing spend could be a lost cause.

Joe Sallustio, Ed.D. is the COO and Executive Vice President at **Claremont Lincoln University** (CLU), a non-profit online university offering master's degrees through a Socially Conscious Education®. Joe oversees all areas of university operations, including business administration, enrollment management, marketing and more. His role is to ensure that CLU is at the forefront of innovative graduate education in the 21st century by being disruptive, innovative and disciplined. Joe also hosts **The EdUp Experience** podcast where he interviews some of the most intriguing and influential people across higher education.

Read More On

Higher Education   Online Learning

GET THE NEWSLETTER

Subscribe to FierceEducation to get industry news and updates delivered to your inbox.

Email

SIGN UP

☐ I acknowledge that I may receive emails from FierceEducation and on behalf of their trusted partners.

About the Author

Fierce Education Staff

FIERCE
Education

GENERAL   **CONTACT**   **NEWSLETTERS**   **CONNECT**

Home   About Us   Subscribe

Privacy   Advertise   Manage Subscriptions

Terms Of Use