A Strategic Response to COVID-19:
Tips for Enrollment Management Professionals

On January 19, 2020, the first patient in the United States was diagnosed with Coronavirus.[1] The patient traveled to China, and it was assumed he was exposed there. Early on, officials theorized that only those who had traveled outside the country would be at risk. That idea was quickly revised when other cases cropped up in individuals who had not left the United States in recent history.

Today, we face an unprecedented situation where educational institutions have closed campuses and shifted to online business both in and out of the classroom.

There is a tremendous amount of uncertainty about timelines for resolution and when we can expect the recruiting process to return to normal.

Enrollment professionals need a plan to mitigate the effects of the current situation while recognizing they must still bring in their next class.

The enrollmentFUEL team collaborated to create this tip sheet. In it, we identify multiple areas where you may need to mount a strategic response, based on your campus' resources and position.

Your success is important to us. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any member of our team for assistance. We are on standby during these challenging times. Please feel free to also call me at any time at 423.823.2022, or WhatsApp me at the same number for a video chat.

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1. https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2001191?query=recirc_mostViewed_railB_article

Shifting to Online Education

The move to online classes could have an impact beyond the current year if the transition is handled poorly. There are clear retention factors to consider if students feel the transition lessened the ROI on their tuition dollars and decide to not return to your institution to complete their degree. This reality gives enrollment professionals a significant stake in ensuring a successful transition.

Gen Z is a tech-savvy group. In an article from 2016, research showed 5.8 million college students were engaged in online learning in some capacity.[2] Even so, there may be a need to hold information sessions about your institution's approach to online learning and offer the sessions to both current and potential students along with their families.

A mounting body of evidence indicates students in online classes can achieve the same learning objectives they can achieve in face-to-face environments.[3] However, there could be faculty members who do not fully accept the value and legitimacy of online education. (Only 29.1% of chief academic officers believe their faculty accept the value and legitimacy of online education.[4]) If Negative Nellies and Neds communicate their displeasure with having to teach students online, or perform poorly due to lack of enthusiasm, recruiting could suffer from the following:

• Students who choose not to return the following year due to "quality" issues

• Negative posts about your school on review sites and social media

It would be a good idea to work with your marketing and communications team to set up a resource page covering:

• Factors that lead to student success in online courses, such as the need to attend live sessions, and finding a quiet location for participation. There are plenty of tips available on the internet, so it should be easy to put together a dedicated web page with tips sheets for your institution.

• Share information about office hours, tutoring, your online librarian, and what students should do if their home does not have internet service. While this varies by location, some internet providers are instituting special programs to provide low-income households with services, allowing students access to online education. You may want to investigate this.

• If you have writing labs or math labs, keep them open virtually.

• Provide resources for students who need to access devices. Is there an existing campus fund to help with purchases? Be sure your financial aid office is equipped to answer these types of questions.

• Do everything you can to promote support for psychological counseling. Being away from friends and school is an experience no student has faced before. Work with your health and wellness center to offer online, secure, and confidential sessions by video and phone. These sessions can be conducted by counseling staff, student life staff, and even RAs where students have strong connections.

2. Elaine Allen, Seaman, J., Babson Survey Research Group, & Quahog Research Group, LLC. (2016) Online Report Card: Tracking Online Education in the United States. Distributed By Eric Clearinghouse. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED572777
3. Ibid
4. Ibid

Communication Counts

Stop and evaluate messaging. Consider sending a "Letter from the President." People want to know the top person cares about them when times are tough. If you have data you can mine, you may want to send your inquiries a personalized letter from the Vice President of Enrollment. Mention everything pertinent. If the student visited, mention it. If the student applied, mention it. If the student deposited, mention it. Use other, relevant information gleaned by using data capture tools like enrollmentFUEL's clickCAPTURE™ technology. Make the student feel like you know them, understand their concerns, and genuinely care – because you do!

You may want to review deposit deadlines, determine if you should make adjustments, and communicate any change in dates to students. Many of the clients working with FUEL have already adjusted their deposit deadline by a month and updated websites to reflect this change.

Getting Transcripts

High schools are closed, but many students have access to online portals where they can screenshot current grades. You may want to consider accepting this unofficial information, even if the acceptance must be conditional until the receipt of the official data. Necessity is the mother of invention. If ever there was a time to get creative and examine policies, this is it. Don't let conviction to policy be the reason your don't enroll your class.

Take Offline Events Online

For the immediate future, colleges and universities have canceled visit days and accepted student events, leaving a void for students who are making important choices about their future. Virtual tours and online information sessions may not completely close the gap, but they will shrink it.

Ideas for information sessions include:

• Live information sessions with department heads or other faculty who are excellent representatives of your school to allow interactivity – and record sessions for students who can't attend

• Information sessions with financial aid

• Students conducting "Life on Campus" sessions – which can have a calming effect by showing real people who were affected by events, and who still believe in your school

• Running a "slide show" of photos to provide a campus tour

• Use of live GoPro streaming

Work Your Funnel

It is not the time to lighten up on working inquiries. If anything, you want to step up communications and keep your commFLOW™ rolling, even if you need to outsource. Emails, phone calls, texts, and mail may require some modification, but now, more than ever, it is essential to stay in touch with your potential students. They are a captive audience and are home to receive your communications. In fact, FUEL has seen an increase in the number of email opens and calls being answered in the last few weeks.

Add a special section with Frequently Asked Questions about the current situation to your website—or, an update page. Whatever you do, be sure the **tone is positive**.

Think about how you approach your local students. After 9/11, many students felt uneasy about being far from their family. They decided to attend college closer to home. Be diligent about staying in front of this group.

Be innovative about using student ambassadors. They are home with time on their hands. Task them to make calls or text your applicants in an effort to make human connections between peers that are genuine and supportive. Current students who are trained correctly can help prospects feel good about their decision to still enroll.

Don't overlook international students, either. The travel ban will lift. When that happens, communicate you are ready and equipped to host them.

Step Up the Social

Future students who have your school on their minds are very likely to see what you are posting. While it is important to use these channels to keep students abreast of events, you will be missing an opportunity if you don't continue with posts that help students envision their bright future at your school.

Ideas for topics are:

• Stories about students

• Posts that help students see how their education links to their purpose

• Posts from faculty members sharing information on courses

• Alumni stories

• Information snippets about your campus

Monitor Review Sites

Gen Z reads college reviews because they offer insight based on a student's actual experiences. To get a feel for what students are saying, you may want to check out one of these sites:

• www.unigo.com

• www.niche.com

• www.gradreports.com

• www.studentsreview.com

If you spot a negative trend, don't ignore it. Work with your student ambassadors on a strategy to increase the number of positive reviews.

Use Digital Ads

Everyone is going to be spending a lot more time on tablets, computers, and phones during the next few weeks. Digital ads serve as in-home billboards for your school, keeping your institution top-of-mind during this critical time when students are making decisions.

For more information on the topic, please visit
enrollmentfuel.com/digital-ads

Download our executive brief on using IP targeting and retargeting to reach goals.

<p align="center">The race isn't over.
There are still many months
between now and the first day of class.</p>

<p align="center">Stay focused. Stay positive.
Readjust as circumstances demand. With hard work
and a solid strategy, you and your team can win.</p>

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