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USING BEST ENROLLMENT PRACTICES - WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED MOST

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Summer months are a critical period for college admissions offices. That's when administrators are assessing accomplishments from the previous year, and dealing with potential shortfalls for the upcoming year.

Even before July and August, however, enrollment professionals begin holding their breath. Usually by May, room-deposit trends are well established, signaling whether the enrollment staff will celebrate or commiserate.

On most private college campuses, even a slight decrease in

USING BEST ENROLLMENT PRACTICES – WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED MOST CONTINUED:

net revenue and yield, established by what happens in the admissions office, can translate into layoffs and cutbacks.

It is critical therefore, that college CEOs closely monitor and encourage excellence in recruiting and retaining students. Because enrollment is one of two important revenue producers for any college or university (fund-raising being the other), presidents cannot afford to take their eyes off the ball for even a short time. Continuous, focused attention on the admissions process is essential.

For many years, we led the Council of Independent College's New Presidents Program. Here are some pointers on effective enrollment practice that we offered new college CEOs:

Hire the best and brightest.

Nowhere is hiring talented professionals more critical than in the appointments of the chief enrollment officer and director of financial aid. Our research and historical perspective suggest that effective presidents surround themselves with the best, brightest and most productive people in key leadership posts – especially in student recruitment and retention.

Competition for enrollment during the last 15 years has required a new level of sophistication; simultaneously, marketing trends have changed almost daily, and financial aid challenges have become increasingly complex. Moreover, rapidly accelerating change due to advances in technology, particularly the widespread use of social media, is impacting the race to recruit well-qualified students. Thus, what worked yesterday may not work tomorrow, dictating that seasoned professionals from a decade ago need to continuously invest in staff development to refresh their knowledge base and ensure best enrollment practice.

Seek focus in challenging times.

A sustained effort is vital in the enrollment and student financial aid areas. The late W. Edwards Deming, world-renowned quality expert, admonished us to create “constancy of purpose” or “aim” as part of any individual or

organizational pursuit of continual improvement. “We cannot program our GPS to a destination that does not exist,” writes J. Gerald Suarez, a fellow at the University of Maryland's Center for Leadership, Innovation and Change. Focus and what Suarez terms “the ability to rise above the turbulence” are critical characteristics of successful enrollment managers and student financial aid officers.

Hire an executive search firm.

Because the staff search process has become increasingly sophisticated, and the stakes for success even higher, we are strong advocates for retaining executive search firms for top enrollment posts. No longer can colleges place an advertisement and hope to land a sufficiently talented pool. Seasoned recruiters will not only be cost-effective, but they will also enlarge the candidate pool, identifying those who might not otherwise apply. Moreover, executive search firms can best perform “due diligence,” checking off-resume references and vetting both candidate and institutional history – preventing costly turnover resulting from mistakes in hiring.

Academic Search, Inc., of Washington, D.C., and Hyatt-Fennell Executive Search of Pittsburgh are two of the most experienced firms in the business.

Seek outside counsel.

Equally important is the perspective of outside counsel experienced in working with enrollment management professionals. Objective consultants evaluate talent while identifying areas for program and personnel development. After you've hired wisely, such consultation on a regular basis will build on success by devoting appropriate resources to your enrollment program and fostering staff development. The Dysart Group of Charlotte, NC is one of the most experienced enrollment and financial aid consulting firms in the business.

Of the over 1,500 private colleges in the United States, approximately 30 percent have enrollments under 1,000 students. Many are expecting an enrollment shortfall in their incoming classes. By following these guidelines, your campus can minimize its chances of being among them.

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