

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT: THE NEW NORMAL

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The past 18 months have been anything but normal. While we are sure there is much we would all like to forget about the pandemic, there were some invaluable lessons learned and policies created that will affect enrollment practices for years and years to come.

Moreover, we can no longer hide behind the constraints of the pandemic and make excuses for our enrollment and retention efforts. After over a year of challenges—and overcoming those challenges—we must fully embrace our capacity to change with or without the catalyst of crisis.

With that in mind, we offer the following advice as we move into a post-pandemic new normal for the enrollment cycle to come.

Keep What Works

Enrollment offices across the country not only reinvented the wheel but reimagined the wheel entirely when the world went remote in March 2020. Just because most parts of the country are reopening does not mean that the innovations created since then are now obsolete. Examine what really works and what is worth keeping. Students and families now expect some sort of remote option for those who cannot attend meetings and orientations in person. While hybrid events may be hard to manage, consider offering remote events after in-person events for those who were unable to attend. Accommodating students and families and meeting them “where they are” may help hook out-of-state recruits.

Drop What Doesn't Work

If remote work hasn't been working for your enrollment operation, then call the team back to campus. If virtual visits

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT: THE NEW NORMAL CONTINUED:

were lackluster, then rethink your messaging. Has “test optional” elevated the caliber of the incoming class or has it just convoluted an already complicated acceptance process?

Just like before the pandemic, do what works best for your team and your strategy. Know that positive results are more important than trying to be everything to every student.

Examine Your Core Values

If in-person instruction is a top priority for your institution and recruitment strategy, then consider all the ways you can ensure safe, in-person learning this semester. Don’t be afraid to make hard decisions. Students and families whose priorities and values align with your institution’s will appreciate the transparency and strong leadership.

The COVID-19 College Challenge is a great coalition of like-minded colleges and universities that have decided that mandating COVID-19 vaccinations for students and/or faculty and staff is what is right for their new normal. While much of the academic world is based on the tenets of freedom and diversity of thought, we are also a group that believes in science. We trust data, and the data shows that students want to learn in the classroom, not in the chat room. By requiring COVID-19 vaccinations, this is one-way colleges and universities can ensure that the students they have worked so hard to recruit remain healthy and enrolled in a thriving campus environment.

Embrace Your Capacity to Change

National and local discussion of free community college for students who meet certain criteria requires many colleges and universities to adapt now. Examine your stack-on offerings. Add more in areas of national interest—early childhood education, computer and data science, supply chain management, and more.

Many students are now pursuing master’s degrees, which means three things:

- 1) Current, relevant master’s programs should be highly promoted.
- 2) New master’s programs in growing areas should be added quickly.
- 3) The cost of a bachelor’s degree is more important than ever as many students will be taking on more debt for a master’s degree.

Helping new students see the value of your institution—through cost, cooperative employment options, retention, and support efforts, and/or graduate school opportunities—is paramount to surviving in this post-pandemic world.

Like anything “new,” our new normal will likely come with a honeymoon phase where the novelty of in-person prospective student visits and events will result in a flood of inquiries and interest. It is important to remember that the challenges of the last year have not simply disappeared because we’re no longer wearing facial coverings. Producing positive enrollment results, especially at small, private institutions, will be essential to helping colleges and universities return to a healthy bottom line; and thus, back to a more normal environment.

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