

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## NEW YEAR, NEW U: THE CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL FOR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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It's 2022, and the future is now. In enrollment, we cannot afford to wait until things "go back to normal." There is no normal, anymore. There is only now and how we're going to make our goals now and in the future.

Despite all the changes and challenges since 2020, enrollment models that focus attention on graduate, special session (mini-term), early enrollment (pre-collegiate), and online (non-traditional) remain highly successful. The world has changed, and thus, our students have changed. Continuing to focus attention on an enrollment model that reflects service to diverse student markets will continue to yield fruitful results.

The model is based on over 30 years of experience leading liberal arts colleges and research we conducted with over 150 college and university presidents; information we have shared during the past 18 years through two popular thought series for higher-education presidents nationwide. "Presidential Perspectives" ([www.presidentialperspectives.org](http://www.presidentialperspectives.org)) and "President to President" ([www.president2president.com](http://www.president2president.com)) are higher education leadership series written by college presidents for college presidents.

This year's series, titled "The Vitality and Power of Higher Education," examines how higher education is emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with renewed vitality, a powerful community presence, and a stronger and more personalized student experience for all.

That personalized student experience needs to start from the first inquiry and remain through every interaction, all the way to

## NEW YEAR, NEW U CONTINUED:

the top. A winning enrollment strategy starts with a president fully committed to a comprehensive enrollment plan based on an overarching vision for the institution. The Board must understand and visibly support the setting of large but realistic goals, and sustainable viability, to be achieved by the president (“the primary spokesperson and advocate of the strategy”) and his or her team.

In successful strategic planning, objectives should be realistic enough to inspire consensus and commitment to results. To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- Commission an independent Institutional Review to evaluate current conditions and assess opportunities. This will provide the basis for a four-part comprehensive planning model including space-utilization study, condition assessment, 10-year master plan, and strategic plan.
- Utilize experienced counsel to develop an enrollment matrix that will control the discount rate, produce a significant return on investment, and evaluate staff effectiveness. Staff evaluations should be based on specific objectives and outcomes. If the last time this was done was in “panic mode” during the height of the pandemic, reevaluate now with a clearer head. Every student in the headcount matters, as does every staff member on payroll.
- Dedicate gift dollars and, if necessary, some leveraged borrowing to build or renovate high-impact facilities. The pandemic revealed that place matters, and traditional students prefer to do most learning in-person. With this in mind, “tired” classrooms, grounds, and facilities, not to mention inadequate technology, create a drag on the entire enrollment process. Transformational presidents recognize the importance of attractive facilities and look for creative ways to fund improvements. Athletic facilities -- artificial turf, lights, all-weather tracks, and improved locker, training, and weight facilities-- are a useful starting point. (The revitalized facilities can enable the institution to attract a new brand of coach, responsible for recruiting scholar-athletes who will be successful on and off the field or court.)
- Add extra-curricular and co-curricular activities that will utilize these facilities and boost enrollment. (A marching band will also support the music program, for example.)

We also suggest:

- Consider the use of part-time staff for call center and contract services to supplement research and branding staff.
- Create cost-effective, synergistic partnerships to support the library, learning resources, and technology all-important to ensuring student success.
- Supplement traditional program growth with a modest but student-centered, non-traditional adult program. Online offerings often succeed here.
- Utilize branding and marketing dollars wisely. Although most successful brands are not created overnight, judicious use of resources can result in a highly effective, long-term strategy.
- Develop a comprehensive internal communications plan that will help to drive the external one. Briefing faculty, staff, students, and volunteers on goals and successes and keeping them on message will pay dividends in public opinion and fundraising, and, even more important, in enrollment and retention.
- Periodically utilize external counsel to evaluate results objectively and recommend areas for improvement from an informed, outside perspective.
- Ensure that the president is visible at all admissions open houses, as well as parents and family weekends. Remember that he or she is not only the chief spokesperson for the institution but also its best sales executive.

In the highly competitive, supercharged enrollment landscape of today, no institution can afford to be complacent or to rely on strategies of the past. That means that progress and sustainability in enrollment depend on a forward-looking, innovative, and integrated recruitment strategy. It begins with the president, is sustained by bold but realistic thinking and planning, benefits from investment in infrastructure, and relies on motivated, regularly evaluated staff.

Have no doubt: enrollment will remain challenging in this new year and into the future. Only by strategizing and evaluating often with the president as a key player can enrollment offices rise to meet those challenges and succeed.