

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF DWYER EDUCATION STRATEGIES

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 2

APRIL 1, 2022

## THE BOTTOM LINE ON STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Dr. Marylouise Fennell  
Principal  
Hyatt-Fennell

Dr. Scott D. Miller  
President  
Virginia Wesleyan University

The battle for attracting incoming students is in its fiercest and final days. At this time of year, every interaction with a prospective student is incredibly important as every student counts. And while some institutions are enjoying record fundraising dollars from private donors and public fund allocations, many, many institutions are still reeling from the financial realities of the pandemic, doing their best to stay afloat.

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, more than 1 million undergraduate students have gone missing since the start of the pandemic.

As such, we've thought a lot about how to remain competitive in this current recruitment climate. Many

## THE BOTTOM LINE ON STUDENT RECRUITMENT CONTINUED:

institutions will offer unprecedented financial aid packages to new students, trying to lure them to their campuses on cost alone. But fighting the student recruitment battle this way is much like trying to win a price war against Wal-Mart or Amazon. Most schools just can't do it and remain fiscally sound. So, what should you be doing?

### Make Your Best Offer

While it is completely understandable that affordability be a top consideration for prospective students, the idea of affordability can cover a range of price tags. Make your best financial aid offer to prospective students, but don't expect the offer's bottom line to do all the work for you.

Neil Diamond sang, "Money talks, but it can't sing and dance, and it can't walk." An institution's best offer should include so much more than an attractive financial aid package. It should paint a picture of life on your campus so vivid and appealing that students will understand that "fit" and cost are equally as important when selecting a college.

### Demonstrate Your Value

Just because the bottom line of one institution's financial aid package is better than your best offer, does not mean that you are out of the race. Highlight your institution's unique features – be it top-quality majors, new facilities, and/or opportunities and partnerships in the surrounding area as a part of your value.

Be sure to relate all the ways your institution is focused on serving the whole student, not just through affordability and financial wellness, but in other areas as well. Perhaps physical wellness at your institution is best offered through intramurals and collegiate sports, or maybe your campus is in a mild climate where regular outdoor activity is easily accessible.

Highlight your institution's efforts in mental and social wellness, too. After a tough two years during the pandemic, these students are dealing with a lot and need a campus community that will not only challenge them to do their best, but also nurture them when they are not at their best. The availability of counseling services,

numerous special interest clubs, a robust student activities schedule, and campus security and safety all add to the value of your institution. Remember, it is the role of the Office of Enrollment to sell the student on the whole institution, not just the financial aid offer.

### Focus on Personal Connections

There's not much that can outweigh a personal connection to a place. While this generation of current and prospective students prefers digital platforms to create personal connections, the connections are just as valuable when made. Savvy enrollment counselors are already using those platforms to create and enhance connections made with prospective students.

But in these dog days of the recruitment cycle, more must be done. There needs to be involvement from coaches, relevant faculty, and even current students to help tell the story of the institution on such digital platforms. The more friendly and varied voices prospective students hear, the more they will come to understand the culture of your institution and how well they will fit in.

The bottom line is that there should be more to a student's decision about choosing a college than the financial bottom line. It is up to each institution to help prospective students see the whole institution in terms of affordability, value, and opportunities for personal growth and success.

And remember, the battle for students isn't truly over until the first day of the semester. The enrollment offices that keep their heads and hearts in the fight to gain and retain students throughout the summer will be the ones smiling at *their* bottom line in the fall.

*Dr. Scott D. Miller is President of Virginia Wesleyan University, Virginia Beach, VA. Previously, he was President of Bethany College, Wesley College, and Lincoln Memorial University. He is Chair of the Board of Directors of Academic Search, Inc.*

*Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, a former president of Carlow University, is senior counsel for the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and principal of Hyatt Fennell, a higher education search firm.*