

PRACTICING RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSION IN A CHANGING WORLD

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У статті відображені результати дослідження менеджменту системи вищих навчальних закладів США з питання рекрутування та прийому студентів. Розглядається пілотний варіант концептуальної схеми розвитку менеджменту рекрутування студентів у системі вищої освіти України.

The paper reveals the results of the case study on enrollment and admission management in the US higher education system. A pilot conceptual framework for the development of a student recruitment management system for higher education institutions in Ukraine is provided.

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Historical and demographic influences have allowed admission and recruitment practices to evolve and develop over the past 400 years of American higher education. During the first 300 years, admission duties were performed by a variety of college personnel and were primarily an orientation function, absent of any screening or recruitment. College presidents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries performed a dual role as recruiter and fundraiser. From the Civil War to World War II, America witnessed an increase in the number and variety of colleges. Enrollment growth ensued and denominational colleges were founded across the continent, while land-grant and state-supported universities brought a college education closer to the people. These actions translated into enrollment growth and recruitment efforts settled into an admissions role of screening and seeking a strong instructional fit for the student and college.

Origins of modern recruitment practices can be found in the mass expansion of higher education since World War II, emerging directly from the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944

and the baby boom that followed. The rise in applications during the 1960s and early 1970s led many colleges to increase enrollments and concurrently expand capacity. The abundance of college enrollees reversed during the 1980s leaving colleges with increased capacity and a declining applicant pool. The prospects of declining enrollments prompted colleges and universities to adopt marketing practices used in business that centered around emphasis on product, price, place, and promotion. College recruiting practices became reliant on market principles for success and matured into providing more information and increased attention to the prospective student.

Nowadays the college admission process is viewed by university leaders, public, media, parents and students as a gateway to future prosperity, health, security, and satisfaction. Education officials set a laser-like light on the point of college access trying to answer the question: is the admissions office door the focus of all these hopes and dreams? Many say positive. So, what can be done from an enrollment management standpoint to improve college access and facilitate success of practices that serve to better meet the needs of students?

To give the answers it is necessary to understand how much is known about key environmental metrics that effect institution's enrollment results. There are several trends that demand attention, but the most essential appear to be institution's price sensitivity in the light of current financial concerns and rapidly changing profile of the prospective student with new higher demands.

The first position is rather controversial, as on the one hand financial crisis influences the size of population groups what tend to result in important economic and behavioral effects and consequently make impact on the college enrollment rates. In addition, raise the proportion of families with two or more children of college age with increase in financial stress also can lead to lower enrollment. If the economy does not improve soon many parents will think about sending their children to two-year colleges but not four-year institutions. What should colleges do? They should figure out a way to lower tuitions before an education market meltdown occurs. Nevertheless, dealing with struggling economies and large budget cuts, which have a "dramatic impact" on public higher education; institutions give way to large tuition increase trying to return investments. The cost of higher education in relation to the economic return of that education, on average, is reaching a level of apparent genuine unsustainability.

On the other hand some colleges claim experiencing increase in programs, especially degrees which award credit for life. The poor job market probably plays a role in encouraging more young people to pursue higher education. In addition to economic conditions, much of the increase is due to a flood of non-traditional-aged students who include displaced workers seeking skills and training to be competitive in the workforce. Often we need crisis to wake everybody up, so now institutions are in the process of changing their policies to bring education to a contemporary context and create a new approach to working with students.

At the same time prospective students' behaviour is rapidly changing: institutions may experience increase in applications, in conversion from inquiry to applicant and increase in "stealth" applicants. It is estimated that across the U.S., approximately 30% of all college applicants apply to their college of choice without ever filling out an inquiry card at a traditional college fair. In the admissions profession, these applicants are commonly referred to as "stealth applicants." The national rise in stealth applicants, which is expected to increase to 40% in the next year, means that universities are slowly losing their ability to communicate with prospective students at the inquiry level. As a result, universities must evaluate the ways in which they are communicating with their applicants, and they must make sure that these strategies are in alignment with the stealth applicants' preferred mode of communication. However, it brings decrease in admit and completion rates and decrease in yield from admit to enroll. "Stealth applicants" make the old inquiry-to-application conversion meaningless and prospective students are remaining anonymous in the college selection process longer than ever before becoming so called "secret shoppers".

Then, today's college-bound individuals (Millennials) approach the college search with far greater awareness, sophistication and thought than preceding generations. Even parents report becoming "helicopter parents" (Vicky Burkett 2010), regular contacting with teenager children by texting and phone calls, having a desire to help them navigate through life on the best educational path. Parents want to direct children to particular college Web sites; begin arranging college visits

and suggesting what questions to ask. Parents of Millennials expect to be informed and recruited by higher education institutions just as their college-bound children are or will be (Coburn 2006).

A survey conducted by Noel-Levitz (Noel-Levitz 2009) found that 88 percent of college-bound prospective students would be disappointed or possibly eliminate a school from consideration if the institution's Web site did not meet their expectations. This overwhelming majority emphasizes the impact technology can have on student recruitment.

This growth illustrates an incredible opportunity and challenge for admission personnel to reinvent how they recruit college-bound students. Over the years, generalized best practices for how colleges and universities should advertise themselves and engage with today's prospective students have created an emphasis on the following: use of multimedia (whether it is face-to-face or online), simpler Web sites, personalized messages (both in print and electronic) and keeping individualized contact as relevant and practical as possible (Chimes and Gordon 2008).

Due to the ever-present flow of information from colleges' websites, organizations, rankings lists, student blogs, and media coverage of trends and issues in higher education, applicants and their parents expect a good deal more from heart-in-their-hands visits to campus or interaction with staff and alumni interviews on home ground. They seek for the best investment of the least money to make the basis for successful future and are becoming choosier, requiring ever-increasing credentials and specialized training for future jobs.

Admission Offices must change enrollment policies to survive and fit the new realities of the competitive marketplace and needs of applicants-consumers in the conditions of a challenging economy, shifting demographics and shrinking endowments. Would-be students believe in joining a close-knit community of thinkers, doers and dreamers who open themselves to discovery and innovation, arts and sciences that will shape their lives in future. Therefore, it is not an easy question how to make a right choice of the right college for applicants and at the same time, it is the same challenging process for the University Admissions Offices each year who have to help future students decide what their educational future will be and where it will take place.

What does Ukrainian Universities need to improve the chances of success?

Ukrainian University Enrollment System can be characterized as a Hybrid Enrollment System (moving toward centralization). Historical belief in departmental autonomy and unwillingness to surrender more control to a central enrollment figure by Deans prevent greater centralization having a sense that a less centralized approach is already working. President, Provosts and senior leadership team are committed to centralizing Enrollment Management units in response to external environment, in pursuit of resources to follow changing environmental trends and fulfill students and Faculty aspiration.

Having internal capacity for research and policy analysis and at the same time with limited funds available for consultants and vendors there are some possible approaches the University authorities can consider: **what do you**

1. To reconsider **University Strategic enrollment planning** as a continuous and data informed process that provides realistic goals, uses a return-on-investment approach, aligns the institution's mission, current state, marketing and changing environment of recent demographic trends and projected demand for new academic programs. Data collection can help reconfirm what the mission statements of the University are to shape the recruitment efforts of student enrollment considering price sensitivity.

2. To identify **Strategic Enrollment Planning Priorities** to reach short- and long term enrollment management effectiveness. It is possible to start with conducting a situation analysis and assessment that will lead to the development of strategies, action and support plan development while considering existing and potential investments.

3. To organize a **Strategic Enrollment Planning Council** with working committees to create relevant reports, conduct data-driven discussions; make decisions based on information analysis and weekly/monthly projects and activities to balance educational goals and business approach and to find answers on the questions: What has been the increase of tuition in recent years? What was the impact on the enrollment? What is the revenue? Where is the money invested? What sum is given on enrollment management development?

4. Based on region demands to learn who the main real nearest **competitors** are to market the University effectively and align student expectations with institution proposal and Faculty satisfaction, which can result in positive alumni outcomes against top competitors. It is important to learn how competitors position themselves, their marketing messages, program offerings and enrollment trends for University not simply duplicate the positioning of the other institutions but determine its own brand messages and target audience.

5. To monitor four risk categories: **academic preparation, educational aspiration, financial needs and social integration** and focus on **trends that demand primary attention**: financial issues, vulnerable market, and disruptive innovations to develop the ability to adapt and respond. Besides keeping to the policy of high retention consider the idea of attracting more transfer/graduate/subpopulation students to the university who can bring money and increase institutional revenue.

6. To make **focus on flexibility of studying** which can create an opportunity for University to gain attractiveness and better positioning among the competitors. To map out what new courses can be offered, to decline the majors that are not marketable, to start online and hybrid courses for adult subpopulation.

7. To build a **new attitudinal perception** of the University among the Faculty and current students and at the regional market through promoting and supporting the University with college branded products (sweatshirts, tees, college uniforms, mugs, pens and more). When wear University clothing or use any number of items with the college logo people will help promote and support the university name recognition.

8. To research a **Student Alumni Profile** and build create an essential bridge between alumna and University, involve former students with successful careers into recruiting (host college presentations), look for ways to encourage alumni to make possible Gifts to the University Fund tuition revenues, ensuring that all students have access to a quality education.

9. It is necessary to use multiple communication strategies to build relations with prospects **targeting second audience** of the prospective students – parents and influences can better position University and bring increase of enrollment. Quick responding on inquiry, sending meaningful information about majors and financial aid designed in the format for parents can benefit the institution.

10. The higher education environment is getting more challenging every year. Communicating with prospective students has undergone a profound transformation in the past ten years. Campus marketing—like marketing for any organization—had to adapt first to the Internet and e-mail and now to new social media formats like social networking and blogging. With the increased prominence of e-communications in student recruitment, it almost seems that colleges have to “trick” students in order to engage them **online, flash-based design**, and other visual elements. 90% of Ukrainian applicants are “secret shoppers”. We are moving to the point when all prospective students are using electronic inquiry before applying to the institution. Enrollment management professionals must guide the University Campus to start considering students want to talk their own language of **e-mail, smart- phone, and social media**.

11. Universities around the world employ **online video** as a tool to reach potential students. Often, these videos take the form of a broad overview of the school or a video tour for students who have not visited the campus. While this approach is usually effective as an introduction, the messages these videos convey are typically broad, reaching out to as many people in the target population as possible.

12. Would-be students are buyers who are interested in the core aspects of a product, but they end up selecting between similar products based on a **personal connection**. At the university, students believe that academics and accessibility to professors are important criteria. However, it is the personal connection to other students and a community feeling that help set the University apart from other schools. The challenge will be to create a **video** that would do this for a broad cross-section of potential students. Identifying connections with other students as a critical success factor for the video project, students should be featured. For this 1) a pool of students from different departments should be developed; 2) it is necessary to create a team of professionals 3) to assess cost and delivery (the intent - to make the videos available on the university’s website, streaming

directly from YouTube) 4) to conduct individual interviews on location (the need of recent technological advances in cameras and editing software).

13. Planning a long-tail marketing campaign utilizing **streaming media** – to have a series of videos composed of students introducing themselves and then speaking candidly about a number of things: why they chose the university, what they found when they arrived, their experiences with the faculty and campus life, and examples of how the university is preparing them for their careers.

14. To enhance usage of Social networking. University should have its own **admission Facebook (Odnoklassniki) page**. This page should reflect the branding and mission of the University. As new prospects and applicants come in, they should be added as a friend to this page - this will allow network to grow. The Admission assistant should be to periodically communicate with prospects with worthwhile content. Another way to utilize Facebook is to enable Facebook sharing for all of University News, Events, and Media. That way if a Facebook user takes interest in something, they can virally share it with their friends via their feed.

15. **Twitter** technology has grown in popularity and now all schools have a Twitter account. But it should be updated at least twice a day with the latest developments in the Admission office including deadlines, dates, and information for applicants and students. An easy way to grow Twitter readership is to publicize it on University website, and also to add prospects and students to the list of followers. Another way to utilize Twitter is to micro-blog an event (an open house, graduation, or sports team/game).

16. Social networking is certainly no replacement for a solid, well-designed Web site, but it can support other e-recruitment efforts. Even better, social networking can help circumnavigate the “secret shopper” syndrome, encouraging students to initiate communication instead of simply browsing Web site anonymously. There are top five content items for campus social networking which should be tried in University: **communication with prospective students**, discussions about courses and academics, about student activities and extracurricular options, insight into school culture and diversity, communication with current students and faculty.

17. One of the best resources to enhance University recruitment efforts is **to involve current students** who can offer insight, advice and a valuable connection to prospective students. Current students should participate in social networks (Facebook pages or Twitter accounts) to increase the exposure for the University. Students should be encouraged **to write about their life at college in Blogs** on the University website for prospective students to read, have an opportunity **to chat in live time** with prospective students, **have a follow up** with prospective students after their visits to campus. Students should give **campus tours** and should set up a twitter account or student blog to stay in touch with the students who visited. That connection can prove to be very important as decision time draws near.

Other benefits of Student to Student Recruitment are:

- High school students love to get the perspective of a student who actually lives on campus and goes to class every day.
- It is easier for high school student to relate to college students
- High school students trust the advice they get from current students. Admission managers work for the college, so prospects want the input from someone who is not on the payroll.
- If current students develop a relationship with prospects, those students will already feel like they have a friend on campus – a major benefit.

There are many ways how to make admission and recruitment efforts of the university more successful but there is always must be the person to take the burden of making the first steps. The University Admission Office should undergo reorganization and involve more officers: full time Admission Officers, three Advisors, and Students assistants. The responsibilities of the Admission Office Director firstly include meetings with the University authorities to discuss new trends which can link to enrollment increasing, reviewing current data /regional/ campus data to identify strategic target market. Meetings with University leadership team should be held armed with data and links to University strategic plan to support the case and gain institutional support to guide and implement the planning and implementation process of monitoring the competitive environment and investigating areas for recruitment. The Admission Office needs special institutional support to

consider recruitment travelling, Students' ambassadors' travelling, regional school visits for enhancing prospects' interest to the college. The following recruitment tools that can be borrowed by Ukrainian Universities Admission Offices:

1. E-recruitment

- a. Online advising tool
- b. Specially designed recruiting page on Web site
- c. Encouraging prospective students to use inquiry forms on admissions Web site
- d. Encouraging prospective students to schedule campus visits on admissions Web site
- e. Electronic mail communication with prospective students. Letter with enclosed brochure. Self-mailer brochure. Letter with viewbook. Viewbook. Catalog.
- f. Using instant messaging to notify prospective students of impending deadlines, events, acceptance, etc.
- g. Chat rooms
- h. Second life virtual tours
- i. Strategic use of **Facebook, Blogging, MySpace and YouTube**. Blogging space for faculty or currently enrolled students / Blogging space for prospective students

2. Traditional Recruitment Efforts

- a. Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of an admitted student enrolling
- b. Contacting secondary school counselors directly
- c. Conducting campus tours and adding a storytelling element
- d. Developing a parent handbook for parents of first-time freshmen
- e. High school visits by admission representatives to primary markets
- f. High school visits by admission representatives to secondary, tertiary, or test markets
- g. Hosting regional open house events
- h. Campus visit days for school students
- i. Participation in international, national or regional college fairs
- j. Participation in College Day/College Night programs
- k. Summer, weekend, evening, or other special workshops or seminars
- l. Using alumni in recruiting
- m. Using faculty in recruiting
- n. Using enrolled students in recruiting
- o. Informing prospective students early of the college admissions process and creating partnerships with local high schools

In conclusion it should be mentioned that the use of technology to market institutions and counsel students adds new dimensions to college recruitment practices. The Internet, World Wide Web, Social Networks are playing a major role in recruiting students while reducing costs for the institutions. Significant elements of college recruitment practices are moving to the Internet and it is common for students to apply online. The Internet affords a prospective student unlimited and uncontrolled access to formal and informal information about any institution.

Marketing and recruitment are likely to become even more sophisticated. Colleges will depend on a recruitment funnel that is tied to integrated marketing efforts and creates relevance long before the first contact is made. College recruitment practices will be increasingly integrated and coordinated throughout the campus to maximize recruiting initiatives. Traditional recruitment practices, improved by Internet-based enhancements, will continue. The campus visit will remain a key component in the recruitment process. Mobilizing the total institution toward an integrated marketing enrollment program that fosters ethical, sound, and efficient recruitment practices will effectively serve prospective students and colleges.

Introducing new ideas to Ukrainian educational establishments and launching new admission campaign can result in faculty, students, and alumni becoming "furious" when the university considers having a new hard work requiring direction. That wave of reactions is all part of a process that plays out with any new campaign, and it takes time to help people understand the goals of a new marketing strategy that often starts with tiresome routine (strategic planning, data analysis, surveys). For the University, the new campaign's goal is to drive home the message that the

university needs to make changes to become stronger, faster, and cleverer to advance itself and society as a whole.

ВІДОМОСТІ ПРО АВТОРА

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Наукові інтереси: проблеми менеджменту вищої освіти.