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ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES

The Need to Deliver Personalized Experiences in the Enrollment System

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There can be countless reasons why an admitted student fails to enroll. A recent study I conducted revealed that one of the most common themes among this population of prospective students was their need for a personalized experience during their enrollment process.

Understandably, before any admitted student decides to enroll, they should carefully evaluate if they will be able to commit the time, money and resources an academic program requires to complete a postsecondary program. Additionally, such an important decision will likely involve a student gathering pertinent academic and financial information from the university and making the attempt to learn for the first time how to successfully navigate the university's multiple student support services, such as its academic advising and financial aid. Although a university can clearly outline step by step all of the information a new student might need in order to enroll, every student is unique and may have different needs. For example, some students may prefer to communicate with a university orally, while others prefer written communication.

Universities seeking to improve their enrollment figures of admitted students should consider a more personalized enrollment process that attempts to accommodate the various needs of this particular student population. A university enrollment system tailored to each student able to accomplish such a personalized approach, might include one that aims to accommodate a student's preferred:

1. Method of communication
2. Time and day in which to communicate
3. Frequency of communication

What's more, a successful enrollment system would allow an institution to capitalize on the opportunity to establish a consistent and reliable student-university relationship.

The demand for a personalized enrollment process from admitted students became apparent throughout the study as all of the participants indicated they did not want general information. Instead, they wanted specific information that applied to only them. The first participant was crystal clear about this. They said, "If I was given a more personalized guidance ... I might have enrolled."

All of the participants expressed a need or want for a personalized relationship within their enrollment process. This particular emerging theme in which participants expressed a need for more of a personalized experience within their enrollment process can be best aligned with Filson and Whittington's 2013 study. Filson and Whittington's study found a strong relationship between a student's level of satisfaction with the level of strength in their personal relationship and the number of interactions with their academic advisors. Similar to the findings within my study, the lack of such

interactions and weaker relationships with university personnel can lead to lower student satisfaction levels (Hudnett, 2015).

Reflecting on Participant Feedback

The first participant in my study, quoted above, further expressed a desire for more assistance on specific scholarships and grants for which she personally qualified. After realizing that the cost was greater than originally expected, she felt that it would have been very helpful if a school representative provided her with a personal road map on how to pay for tuition.

The second participant, who eventually did in fact enroll, was initially a bit confused about two enrollment factors—how the financial aid process worked and how to navigate the courses in which to enroll. She expressed that she would have liked more of a personal guidance from a university representative from the beginning in both of these areas.

The third participant felt she was making all of the effort to figure out the financial aid process and that someone from the university should have assisted her better with the entire process. Moreover, Participant 3 indicated that because of the university's lack of personal information and guidance, she never enrolled at the university or any other university.

The fourth participant never knew she was admitted and enrolled at another university. She stated that prior to her enrolling at that particular school, she had several live in-person meetings, phone discussions, and an exchange of emails with its university representatives. The fourth participant's decision to enroll at a different university was primarily due to how her personal interactions with its university's representative made the enrollment "process so simple."

The fifth participant, who also enrolled at

another university, stated that she did not feel as if the university provided her with enough personal "support." An example she provided in which this occurred was that she felt "she couldn't align her schedule" with a university representative.

The sixth participant enrolled, but immediately unenrolled due to a personal family matter. This process created a debt that the student still owes the university, and she has had very little success in resolving this particular issue. Moreover, she still currently wants to complete her degree, but is not able to until her personal financial aid "ongoing issue" can get resolved between her and the university (Hudnett, 2015).

Problems and Solutions

The participants' responses led me to interpret that a need exists for a more personalized experience within the enrollment process because several participants addressed an experience that included one of following:

1. A lack of guidance;
2. A lack of information;
3. A lack of assistance;
4. The failure to schedule an appointment; and
5. The failure to establish communication with a university representative.

Each participant at some point within the enrollment process had some personalized unanswered questions. Most of the questions were relevant to each of their personalized financial aid needs and concerns and indicated that it influenced their experience within the school's admission process.

I believe that a university can assist

its admitted applicants in receiving a personalized experience by:

1. Providing personalized enrollment guidance and university information;
2. Ensuring that a student's outstanding questions are addressed and acknowledged by a university representative within a reasonable amount of time; and
3. Establishing flexible communication channels that can accommodate a student's unique schedule.

A study conducted by Moogan (2011) found that prospective higher education students want specific and personalized information. Moreover, university communication strategies should approach each potential student as unique and make the strong effort to answer all of their concerns as it benefits both parties equally (Hudnett, 2015).

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