

Executive Summary

Project #7: Creating Prospective Student Communication Plans to Support Strategic Enrollment Management

Problem/Process Improvement:

Northland Community & Technical College has interest in researching and creating unique prospective student communication plans. Currently, Northland communicates with all prospective students in a single voice. The institution has interest in developing unique communications for sub-populations to increase enrollment funnel matriculation. These sub-population communication plans may include non-traditional, diverse, or program specific audiences.

Goal:

Improve enrollment funnel matriculation by 5 percent.

Team Charge:

The project would be conducting research on best practices, developing strategy recommendations, and creating specific sub-population communication plans.

Team Members:

Beth Adams, Central Lakes College
Susan Jansen, Rochester Community & Technical College
Gale Lanning, Minnesota State College, Southeast Technical
David Mills, Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Tracey Roy, Northeast Higher Education District

Executive Sponsor:

Dr. Anne Temte, President, Northland Community & Technical College

Team Advisors:

Jason Trainer, Director of Enrollment Management and Marketing, Northland Community & Technical College
Nicki Carlson, Enrollment Coordinator, Northland Community & Technical College

Project Overview

The Luoma Academy team took a multi-faceted approach to understand the obstacles facing enrollment at Northland Community and Technical College. Over the course of the 2013-14 academic year, the team conducted quantitative and qualitative research using a variety of method, reviewed best practices in enrollment management, reviewed findings from the Noel-Levitz 2012 “Report for Northland Community and Technical College,” visited the East Grand Forks campus, conducted a secret shopper study and reviewed and compared Northland’s data and communication plans to four other Minnesota community colleges.

It should be noted that the team considered information and made recommendations that may be considered outside of the scope of the project charge. This was intended to provide a greater context in enrollment management and organizational structure in an effort to develop a more comprehensive and useful set of recommendations.

Conclusion and Recommendations Based on Research

Communication:

- Communication plans need to be tailored to traditional (less than 24 years old) or non-traditional (24 years old or greater).
- Traditional students want specific but limited information in paper format and respond to texting or sending links to videos in email
- Non-traditional prefer a “shot-gun” approach by reading and absorbing more frequent and detailed information
- Secret shopper revealed that letters and emails were too blunt and matter of fact
- Incorporate the college’s branding and/or other graphics in correspondence
- The dean or director of marketing should review all correspondence to ensure it is warm, inviting and consistent
- The importance of personal relationships cannot be overstated, and should be the focus of the initial contact with potential student(s) and family
- Campus visits are so important that marketing should include and emphasize a brief satisfaction survey for students and family members to complete and return to the college in a pre-paid envelope
- Create focus groups with new students to assess their application to enrollment experience.
- Customer service training should be considered for all college employees
- Electronic communications and an engaging web site are crucial

Marketing:

- Revisit training for marketing and recruiting personnel to ensure understanding, compliance, and effectiveness in the entire process
- Consider that six of the ten most effective methods for recruiting students involve events on campus,
- The college should consider adding open house events to its calendar and explore the possibility of hosting more meetings on campus with area K-12 professionals
- Make intentional connections with high schools and explore opportunities through high school relationships and partnerships
- Have marketers initiate a calling campaign and actively schedule applicants for campus visits
- The campus visit should be strongly promoted and easily accessed
- Visits should be schedule in a manner which will ensure a quality, consistent experience
- Explore ways to include program faculty and coaches in the visit experience
- Develop a calendar and structure for a comprehensive calling campaign plan
- Consider and allocate the resources needed to effectively execute this plan which may include the following groups: prospects who have not completed the application process, applicants who have not enrolled, returning students who have not registered for their next semester, and enrollees who are at risk for being dropped for non-payment.

Organizational Structure/Processes:

- Review the organizational structure to evaluate engagement between recruiting, admissions, and advising/counseling. The Luoma team had the very strong impression that there were rigidly defined roles of each group and that the “handoff” was abrupt and noticeable.
- Conduct process reviews to ensure consistency and enhanced structure within the application, admission, and enrollment process.
- Evaluate the use of Hobsons. Consider abandoning it or committing to a phased implementation plan to include employee training, evaluation of personnel resources required to use the product more extensively. A cost-benefit analysis should be considered and other options explored if the college cannot commit the necessary resources to support the program. Staff my wish to explore the capabilities of MnSCU’s Communications Module which is available for no cost. This would allow for a reallocation of resources.
- Develop a strategic enrollment management plan by engaging constituents from a variety of areas.
- Consider the college’s admissions and recruitment staff’s workload, goals and objectives and conduct an analysis of current staffing and the resources needed to meet the identified goals.
- Explore existing data sources and consider unmet needs. Consider the resources dedicated to institutional research and organizational ties to admissions and other student services.

- Carefully analyze existing conversation rates data to determine where efforts should be concentrated.
- Define a service philosophy and organizational structure to address responsiveness and ensure that students have a consistent and positive experience. Create timely responses for all inquiries. Keep in mind the students of today are expecting an immediate response to inquiries.
- Look for ways in which the organizational structure and differing campus cultures creates challenges. Look to improve mission awareness, a sense of team and enhance “soft skills.”
- Consider the Midlands College’s case study and how Northland may benefit from going through a similar process

Leadership Lessons Learned

1. A variety of behavioral styles is beneficial in developing an action plan.
2. Humor can bring about camaraderie and cohesiveness.
3. Persistence, patience and flexibility is necessary in meeting your goals.
4. It is important to listen to all viewpoints.
5. Brainstorming is essential in developing a plan.
6. Expertise is essential on a team.
7. Be open to research and new ideas.