

# Northland Community & Technical College

## Creating Prospective Student Communication Plans to Support Strategic Enrollment Management

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**Northland Community & Technical College**

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## **I. Executive Summary:**

A team of five participants of the Luoma Leadership Academy were charged with assisting Northland Community and Technical College with conducting research and developing recommendations to improve the College's prospective student communications plans. This report contains research findings and observations made by the team through a variety of efforts including a review of literature, exploration of best practices, a campus visit, a "secret shopper" study, and a comparison against other colleges' processes. Northland has identified a goal of increasing enrollment funnel matriculation by five percent (5%).

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.

## **II. Background:**

### **Project Statement**

Northland Community & Technical College has charged the Luoma Team with researching and creating an effective 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.

### **Project Goal:**

The project goal as stated by Northland - increase enrollment funnel matriculation by five percent (5%).

### **Team Charge:**

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

### **Northland Community & Technical College at a Glance:**

Northland Community and Technical College is located in Northwest Minnesota and has two campuses – one in Thief River Falls and the other on the Minnesota border to North Dakota in East Grand Forks. Northland also has two off-campus sites – the Aerospace Campus in Thief River Falls and a satellite site in Roseau. Northland offers career and technical programs, associate degrees and online programs.

During the 2013 fiscal year, 5,411 students attended Northland. Over a third of the students come from the Northwest counties in Minnesota and about a third from North Dakota. Northland draws students from high schools across northern Minnesota. Lincoln Senior High School in Thief River Falls serves as their primary feeder high school followed by East Grand Forks and Greenbush/Middle River.

Northland's enrollment in fall, 2013 reflected the following student demographics:

- Fall Headcount – 3,754
- 57% Female; 43% Male
- 62% Age 24 or less; 37% Greater than 24
- 46% Full-time; 54% Part-time
- Students of Color – 15%
- Average Age – 26

*Source: MnSCU ITS Management Reports; Northland Community and Technical College Fact Book*

### **Northland's Mission Statement:**

Northland Community & Technical College is dedicated to creating a quality learning environment for all learners through partnerships with students, communities, businesses, and other educational institutions.

### **Northland's Vision Statement:**

Northland Community & Technical College will be widely recognized as a progressive leader in community and technical college education, responsive to the needs of our learners through the use of partnerships, innovation, and technology.

### **MnSCU's Charting the Future Plan:**

There is an assumption in this report that Northland is offering the correct educational programs for the region, and that this is not a barrier to increasing student enrollment rates. As the "Charting the Future" project emphasizes, "Our goal is to prepare the right number of graduates, in the right places with the right skills and knowledge to enable students "career and life success."

Furthermore, the plan has three commitments:

- 1) Ensure access to an extraordinary education for all Minnesotans
- 2) Be the partner of choice to meet Minnesota's workforce and community needs
- 3) Deliver to students, employers, communities and taxpayers the highest value/most affordable higher education option.

### **III. OBSERVATIONS and FINDINGS**

This section outlines the initial steps taken to understand the culture, process, and challenges facing Northland in their enrollment endeavors. 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 methods, 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. Team members met regularly by phone conferencing and participated in two extended in-person meetings. The team had periodic check-ins with the project sponsor as well.

#### **A. Research/Best Practices Review**

This section outlines best practices in recruiting students at two-year public colleges. The first report uses the Noel Levitz 2013 “Marketing and Student Recruitment Practices Benchmark Report for Four Year and Two-Year Institutions.” The second report is from Peter Bryant, a consultant for Noel-Levitz with more than 40 years of experience in enrollment management. The final report is a summary of the article from the *University Business Magazine* entitled, “10 Ways Students Search Colleges Today, and How to Adapt.”

#### **Noel-Levitz 2013 - Top 10 Most Effective Strategies (Notice that 6 of the top 10 are event-related):**

- 1) Encouraging prospective students to apply on the admissions website (very or somewhat effective 87.2%)
- 2) Offering academic programs within high schools for students to earn college credits (very or somewhat effective-78%)
- 3) Offering campus visit days for high school students (very or somewhat effective-82.4%)
- 4) Conducting high school visits by admission representatives to primary markets (very or somewhat effective-88.1%)
- 5) Hosting campus visit events designed for school counselors (very or somewhat effective-72.2%)
- 6) Hosting campus open house events (very or somewhat effective-73.7%)
- 7) Providing “on the spot” admissions decisions in high schools or during campus visits/open houses (very or somewhat effective-55.6%)
- 8) Holding on campus meetings or events for high school counselors (very or somewhat effective-80%)
- 9) Marketing via TV ads (very or somewhat effective-72%)
- 10) Encouraging prospective students to schedule campus visits on the admissions website (very or somewhat effective-73.5%)

### **Noel-Levitz 2013 - Five Least Effective Strategies and Tactics:**

- 1) Targeting high academic ability students (very or somewhat effective-30.4%)
- 2) Offering online net price calculator (very or somewhat effective-34.3%)
- 3) Mailing course schedules to residents in the area (very or somewhat effective-40%)
- 4) Offering flexible payment plans (very or somewhat effective-44.4%)
- 5) Targeting transfer students (very or somewhat effective-48%)

### **Peter Bryant's Nine Strategies for Successful Enrollment Management in Today's Higher Education Environment:**

- 1) Set realistic enrollment goals, not projections: these projections need to be identified by subpopulations such as major, ethnicity, geography, non-traditional and traditional.
- 2) Identify and secure sufficient resources to meet enrollment objectives: the cost of enrolling and retaining a student needs to be identified.
- 3) Develop an annual marketing and recruitment plan as well as a three to five year strategic enrollment and revenue plan: your enrollment plan should be living and reviewed on a frequent basis
- 4) Devote as much attention to student retention as you do to recruitment
- 5) Build your recruitment database and inquiry pool by design, not by chance: build and manage a database with specific conversion and yield goals.
- 6) Track your marketing and recruitment activities: identify which metrics to track and then make marketing decisions on efforts that were successful.
- 7) Qualify and grade prospective students precisely: the secret shopper phenomenon where students make their initial contact on the web page is crucial to enrolling students.
- 8) Implement a strategic communications flow: regardless of where the student enters the flow, progressing them to the next stage is paramount. Electronic communications and a web site that is engaging is crucial. It is better to have fewer social media outlets and monitor those more closely versus having too many to manage.
- 9) Award financial aid so students get what they need and expect to enroll.

### **Enrollment Matters: 10 Ways Students Search Colleges Today, and How to Adapt:**

In *Enrollment Matters*, Jacqueline Gregory highlights the results of an annual survey of high school students - their perception of how colleges communicate with them and how they prefer to communicate with the colleges. RuffaloCODY, an enrollment management firm, administers the "High School Students' Perceptions & Preferences for Communication with Colleges" survey annually to students across the nation. The results are based on a national sample and are not representative of individual colleges but may be used as basis for assessment of recruitment and admissions communications techniques.

	Preferred	Actual
Direct Mail	36%	43%
Email	46%	50%
Telephone	18%	8%

According to the 2013 Survey of High School Students' Communication Perceptions, students prefer to use Email. Gaps are present between the preferred means of communication vs. the actual. Most notably – Telephone.  
 Source: RuffaloCODY 2013 Perceptions and Preferences Report

Students no longer conform to the historical admissions/enrollment funnel. According to the article:

- 1) 97% of the respondents said they will initiate contact with a college if they are interested
- 2) Students search and research online
- 3) Rates of incomplete applications have increased due to information gleaned online resulting in missing personal connectivity to the college.

Gregory stresses the importance of building and maintaining a “relevant digital presence” enabling students to easily search and find all the information needed to make informed decisions. Gregory recommends finding ways to personally connect with the prospective students using various forms of technology and identifying and connecting with the students in a form most appealing to them.

As institutions struggle with enrollment, it becomes more imperative to be purposeful of the types of communication we use, aware of the populations being served and their preferred follow-up measures.

Students are increasingly using online videos to learn about the campus making it important to accurately portray the campus to help encourage a visit. The significant increase in mobile device use has allowed for email access and updates on application and admission status. Colleges need to be diverse and intentional with modes of communication delivery.

## **B. Campus Visit**

Three members of the Luoma Team visited the East Grand Forks campus in October. The visit included a tour of the facility and program areas, conversations with recruitment and marketing staff regarding existing communication plans and their desired future state, sharing the team’s initial findings and a meeting with President Temte.

### Impressions:

Northland’s campus is attractive and well maintained. Signage is attractive and informative, making programs easily identifiable. Also, the state of the art lab facilities such as pharmacy technician, surgical technician, nursing, architecture and construction add significant appeal to the campus.

## Opportunities:

As a guest entering the campus for the first time, it is not intuitively obvious as to how to navigate and locate the appropriate service and information centers. Team members were concerned that this may be off-putting to potential students. The same could be said for the sensed energy and collegiality among the staff which could leave prospective students feeling uneasy or even unwelcomed. This creates an opportunity for administrative leadership to train and engage staff at all levels to ensure a culture of service excellence and positivity.

During the campus visit, Luoma Team members learned that Northland's current communication plan is used for all populations. Therefore, appropriate information and style of communication is not meeting the needs for Northland's different prospective groups, such as traditional and non-traditional students.

Additionally, the current communication flow is designed in a manner that may lead to disconnects. Specifically, the Recruiting Department is responsible for all communications with prospects and applicants. Responsibility for communication shifts to the Advising/Counseling Department at the point in the process at which payment of the application fee is required. Internally, the "handoff" process may be clear, however, for a prospective student, the process may be confusing and lead to a sense of disconnect with what was familiar. The process lacks seamlessness for students seeking enrollment, as the style and consistency of the communication changes significantly after the "handoff." Additionally, it lends the possibility of a student being missed and/or not receiving all of the appropriate information to continue through to matriculation.

It was noted that Northland is not using Hobsons software system to its full potential due to lack of staffing, training and other resources needed to reap the full benefits of the system. Hobsons has many desirable features that could aid in a seamless, timely and consistent communications process. The potential exists for Hobsons to support Northland's relationship management strategies, track applications and other documents, measure conversion rates, and keep students engaged during the application process. With Hobsons Connect, Northland can build, automate, and execute their entire admissions communications plan in one place. Northland could further streamline the admissions processes by tracking applications/recommendation documents using a decision and enrollment module. Finally, Hobsons Radius could be used to manage daily contacts with students, create marketing campaigns, and respond to inquiries in a timely manner. Therefore, utilization of Hobsons for recruiting and admissions could assist in the student staying on task and increase the college's matriculation rates.

### **C. Secret Shopper Study**

Team members conducted "secret shopper" studies at Northland and two other community colleges. Individual communication pieces were analyzed as to quality, content, visual appeal, tone, and the mode of delivery.

**Northland:**

On August 14, 2013, a member of the Luoma team requested information for two program areas from Northland Community & Technical College. She quickly received a generic email thanking her for her interest and encouraging her to sign up for a VIP page. However, the email included a username but not a password, which led to confusion and frustration.

Nonetheless, within 24 hours, our “shopper” did receive a generic email thanking her for becoming a Northland College VIP despite her inability to successfully log on. On August 21<sup>st</sup>, our shopper received another generic email inviting her to visit either campus along with a prompt to make sure she visited her VIP page.

On August 28 our shopper received another email that invited her to apply to the college and informed her of the three application options that are available. Again, the email was very generic and simple. During that same week, she received information in the mail pertaining to her program of interest, a college snapshot sheet, a college preview book, a cost sheet, a financial aid checklist, a student housing information sheet, an Accuplacer pamphlet, and a paper application. The Northland Marketing Department was in the midst of changing their NCTC folder, so the materials came loosely in an envelope.

Finally, on September 4, our shopper received a personal email from one of Northland’s recruiters thanking her for her interests in the college along with more specific information. On September 17, our shopper applied to the college, and within 24 hours received an email thanking her for her application and letting her know that representatives from the college would inform her of any missing materials. On September 24, she received a notice in the mail informing her that she had not paid my application fee. The letter included a manually highlighted section to emphasize the need to pay the fee. Shortly after this point, she sent in a request for a fee waiver and from there did not received any further communication from Northland.

**North Dakota State College of Science:**

Another of the Luoma team members conducted a “secret shopper” study with North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS). He sent an email to NDSCS, expressing interest in several liberal arts programs. Within two weeks he received an envelope from the school with generic information about programs and financial aid. Over the course of the academic year, he probably received no more than two follow up emails.

Our shopper at this institution was very complimentary about NDSCS’s website. Prospective students have the opportunity to click on radio buttons near topics that interested them, and videos specific to their interests pop up. For example, under the topic of Athletics, one can select a button if interested in playing football, and a video pops up that introduces the head football coach who provides an overview of what it would be like to play for that school. There were other videos depicting technical and liberal arts instructors who described their classes and programs.

### **Another MnSCU Community and Technical College:**

A third secret shopper study was conducted with another MnSCU college who wished to go unnamed. After her initial inquiry, the shopper for this institution received three emails, two weeks apart from one another. The first email was very informative with regard to her declared program of interest along with helpful facts about the college. It was signed by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and had visual appeal. The second email received was very impressive as it contained links to websites that guided our shopper as to her next steps in the admissions process. The email was flashy and well written. The third email focused on the college community, how to get involved and athletics. This message also contained links to a variety of websites to go to for more information.

During the same timeframe, our shopper received a letter that was rather generic and covered much of the same material that was provided in last email. The package contained a letter thanking her for her interest, a program information sheet and a viewbook. This letter referred to the shopper as a “transfer student” and covered issues such as affordability, academic opportunities, facilities and community involvement. The program sheet provided did not include a listing of classes but did include a brief program overview, degree options, start dates, career opportunities, gainful employment disclosure, articulation information and websites to access additional information.

### **D. Communication & Admissions Process Comparison to Four Other Community Colleges**

A member of the Luoma team mailed surveys to representatives at four community colleges serving greater Minnesota and followed up with interviews. Enrollment management directors were asked to respond to the following questions:

- a. Do you use different communication modes depending upon the population characteristics or program areas of interest?
- b. Do you purchase lists?
- c. Have you found avenues that work best?
- d. Not so well?
- e. Do you know your prospect to enrolled conversion rate?
- f. Do you know your application to enrolled conversion rate?

While they all had a plan(s), they stressed the importance of flexibility in means of communication techniques from year to year and the need to consider student characteristics. None of the colleges use Hobsons - three of them input prospects into Integrated Statewide Record System (ISRS) and one uses Enrollment Management Action System (EMAS) as their enrollment management system. The later does not enter prospects into ISRS but applicants are entered.

The colleges varied slightly in the delivery and content of their communication plans and have unique packages for pre-high school junior, traditional age juniors, local high school seniors, traditional age seniors, non-traditional age students, and athletes.

None of the colleges use purchased lists. Some had tried this strategy, but it did not yield the expected results. Enrollment directors provided feedback as to what efforts seem to work best. They believe that tailoring communications pieces and modes of delivery to specific groups are most important. Specifically, they recommend providing traditional age students with more succinct material while athletes and non-traditional age students prefer to have a complete packet at one time. Letter and phone calls work better for non-traditional age students. Colleges are using more postcards and recommend sending viewbooks and other promotional material without envelopes. Most prospects are generated from college fairs, high school visits, internet inquiry and coaches. Almost all applicants are generated from the websites. Two of the colleges have found texting to be a valuable mode of communicating to applicants for things like reminders, announcing events and inviting them to registration sessions. One of the colleges surveyed forwards contact information for prospective students to the appropriate program faculty so that they can connect with interested students.

Once college prospects are entered into ISRS, the prospect to enrollment matriculation rate can be calculated. MnSCU has provided access to the Prospect Funnel tool through EPM11. Prospects can be followed through the stages of the enrollment process enabling colleges to compare rates to prior years. A comparison of these rates can be useful in assessing modifications to communication plans and activities. Care must be used when comparing year to year data – there can be inconsistencies in identifying prospects and coding. Only one college surveyed provided an applicant to enrolled conversion rate. That college tracks applicants indicating full-time status and the rate ranges between 71% to 83%.

**Table 1**  
Northland Community & Technical College  
Prospect Funnel – Prospect to Enrollment

	Prospects	Applicants	Applicant Conversion Rate	Admits	Admit Conversion Rate	Enrolled	Enrolled Rate
Fall 2013	455	278	61.1%	275	98.9%	221	80.4%
Fall 2012	720	354	49.2%	351	99.2%	321	91.5%
Fall 2011	2,125	482	22.7%	450	93.4%	422	93.8%
Fall 2010	1,952	373	19.1%	351	94.1%	309	88.0%
Fall 2009	2,544	461	18.1%	439	95.2%	376	85.6%

Source: MnSCU ISRS Operational Data; EPM 11; Student Prospects, Prospective Students Funnel, ran 05-16-14

Northland stated that their project goal is to increase the enrollment funnel matriculation by 5%. The Team is unsure of what source and data set the goal was derived. Another way to look at an enrollment matriculations rate is from applicant to enrolled. Table 2 below shows a five-year comparison of applicants anticipating start in the fall and follows them through to enrollment. While the numbers of applicants and admissions have increased, the number of enrollees has decreased. The rate of applicants to admission status has dropped from 89% to 83% and the enrollment rate has decreased from 61% in the fall of 2009 to 51% in fall of 2013. The larger decrease in enrollment rates indicates a loss of potential students between admitted and enrolled status.

**Table 2**  
Northland Community & Technical College  
Enrollment Matriculation – Applicant to Enrollment

	Applicants	Admits	Admit Conversion Rate	Enrolled	Applicant to Enrolled Conversion Rate
Fall 2013	2196	1828	83%	1109	51%
Fall 2012	2161	1834	85%	1234	57%
Fall 2011	2035	1734	85%	1146	56%
Fall 2010	2065	1764	85%	1204	58%
Fall 2009	2006	1774	89%	1218	61%

*Source: MnSCU ISRS Operational Data; EPM 11; Student Applicants & Admissions, ran 05-20-14*

Using the same data set, the Team also looked at the percentage of applicants who were of traditional age (24 years or less) to non-traditional age and compared their enrollment matriculation rates from applicant status. Over the five-year comparison, fewer applicants are non-traditional age and the applicant to enrollment matriculation has decreased - summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
Northland Community & Technical College  
Traditional Age vs. Non-Traditional  
Enrollment Matriculation – Applicant to Enrollment

	Fall 2009 % of Applicants	Fall 2013 % of Applicants	Fall 2009 Applicant to Enrolled Rate	Fall 2013 Applicant to Enrolled Rate
Traditional Age	60%	80%	66%	54%
Non-Traditional Age	38%	18%	54%	37%

*Source: MnSCU ISRS Operational Data; EPM 11; Student Applicants & Admissions, ran 05-20-14*

## **E. Effective Recruiting and Planning Practices – A Case Study**

Midlands Technical College – Columbia, South Carolina (2008)

1. Objective was to identify best practices to create an effective recruiting plan
2. First task was to identify the college strengths and programs, and community demographics and the target audience
3. Next, identify the role of the college recruiter: Face of the institution, responsible for internal and external marketing, facilitates student's transition to college
4. Common responsibilities for college recruiter:
  - a. Coordinate campus tours and events
  - b. Visit high schools
  - c. Conduct college fairs
  - d. Target non-traditional populations
  - e. Develop relationships with high school counselors
  - f. Speak with students and families
  - g. Provide follow up communication
5. Prioritize high school visits using the following criterion:
  - a. Number of students from this school that graduated from the college and what degree did they complete?
  - b. Number of students currently enrolled in the college?
  - c. Number of students who applied for admission for next fall?
  - d. Ratio of students who apply for admission and then enroll?
6. Non-traditional Students:
  - a. Area demographics?
  - b. Average level of education constituents have?
  - c. Level of education constituents need?
  - d. What are the emerging jobs?
  - e. Who are the largest employers?
  - f. Where can college find other non-traditional students?
  - g. Who are contacts into these areas? Church? Temp employment agencies?
7. Area Competition:
  - a. What other schools are in the area
  - b. Where are they located
  - c. What do they offer, and what are their strengths?
  - d. How do they target students
  - e. Cost? Is this an advantage or disadvantage for your college?
  - f. What is their academic calendar
  - g. How can your college compete or cooperate with other schools?
8. Community Relationships:
  - a. Do you know area principles, counselors, and teachers?
    - i. Do you host events and invite them?
    - ii. Do they host events and invite you?
    - iii. Can you place brochures or other information in their schools?
  - b. Do you know HR Directors, Non-Profit Executives, Church leaders?
    - i. Do you host events and invite them?
    - ii. Do they host events and invite you?

- iii. Can you place brochures or other information in their facilities?
- 9. Successful Recruiting Plan:
  - a. Planning the Work
    - i. Analyze the Enrollment Funnel (Know the number and conversion/yield rate for:
      - 1. Prospects
      - 2. Inquiries
      - 3. Applications
      - 4. Acceptances
      - 5. Assessment
      - 6. Enrolled
      - 7. Determine Each for Term, market segment, program, etc.
    - ii. Target Markets:
      - 1. Primary: High Yield, easily identifiable – spend most time here
      - 2. Secondary: Lower Yield, substantially larger/diverse pool
        - a. Success often related to image/reputation
        - b. Unique programs, offerings
      - 3. Tertiary/Test Markets
    - iii. Successful Current Practices – See Noel Levitz Report
  - b. S.M.A.R.T. Goals – Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely
  - c. Work the Plan
    - i. What are you going to do?
    - ii. When will it be done?
    - iii. Who will be responsible?
    - iv. How much will it cost?
    - v. How will you know if it has been accomplished?
  - d. Excessive Activity Syndrome
    - i. Activity Oriented
      - 1. Redefining issues
      - 2. Failing to set priorities
      - 3. Focusing on Trivial/Non-critical issues
      - 4. Trying to improve too many procedures simultaneously
      - 5. Involving too many people in improvement process
    - ii. Results Oriented
      - 1. Recommending specific actions to address problems
      - 2. Establishing priorities
      - 3. Identifying issues with biggest impact
      - 4. Working to improve a small number of critical processes
      - 5. Involving a limited number of interested individuals
  - e. Evaluation/Repeat Process
    - i. Assessment Technique – focus group, surveys
    - ii. Techniques – vary tools to gather enough data
    - iii. Good assessment practices eliminate wasteful efforts
    - iv. Use institutional research experts to create assessment tool
    - v. Institutionalize Assessment
- 10. Recruit to Retain – it is easier to keep a student than to replace one

## **IV. Recommendations**

In compiling the above information, several themes emerged which suggest that changes in communication, marketing, organizational structure and processes are in order. The Luoma team recommends that administration at Northland consider the following:

### **Communication:**

As evidenced in the “Secret Shopper” study of Northland, there is opportunity to improve the communication flow to prospective students and applicants. First, marketing should tailor communication plans to traditional (less than 24 years old) or non-traditional students (24 years old or greater). Traditional students want specific but limited information in paper format, and respond well to other methods of communication such as texting or sending links to videos in email. Non-traditional students seem to prefer a “shot-gun” approach by reading and absorbing much more frequent and detailed information. The “Secret Shopper” study also indicated that letters and emails that received from Northland were rather blunt and matter-of-fact. The incorporation of the college’s branding and/or other graphics should be considered. The dean or director responsible for marketing should review all correspondence to ensure that letters are warm, inviting, and maintain a consistent feel and personalized touch.

The visit to the East Grand Forks campus by three members of the Luoma team provided a great deal of insight. Perhaps the marketing team knew that these professionals visiting campus were not prospective students, which colored their enthusiasm, but marketing people are on stage at all times. The importance of personal relationships cannot be overstated, and should be the focus of a complete examination and revision to include emphasizing the importance of the initial contact with potential student(s) and family, quality of the marketing presentation, student participation, admissions, faculty and coaches, and thorough training and ambassador supervisors. Campus visits are so important that marketing should include and emphasize a brief satisfaction survey and ask students and family members to complete and return it to the college. Finally, create focus groups with new students to assess their application to enrollment experience. Students are imagining themselves as students on your campus during their visit. It is critical that students leave campus with the feeling that they are wanted and appreciated, and can expect help in navigating their college experience. Getting all employees at the college to understand and appreciate the need to exude positive energy and customer service skills. Training should be considered.

Other opportunities exist for improving communication with potential students. As Paul Bryant points out, electronic communications and an engaging web site are crucial. The college may wish to view North Dakota State College of Science’s web site and consider the creative ways to imbed videos and information presented there.

## **Marketing:**

Review the 2012 report Dr. Jim Hundrieser issued specifically addressing marketing needs at Northland. Many of his recommendations dovetail neatly with best practices the 2013 Noel-Levitz report identified. Specifically, revisit training for marketing and recruiting people to ensure understanding, compliance, and ensure 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. Additionally, make intentional connections with high schools and explore opportunities through high school relationships and partnerships. Customer service is extremely important and cannot be overemphasized. While online scheduling of campus visits is important, have your 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.

It is recommended that the college 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:**

While the recommended changes to the communication and marketing plans affect a limited number of people, organizational and process changes need the support of administration from the president on down. Consider the following proposals:

- 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.
- As previously stated, 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.
- Define tools, processes and metrics to be used in analyzing enrollment funnel data. Analysis of conversion rates will highlight 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.

### **Noel-Levitz 2012 Report for Northland Community & Technical College:**

Dr. Jim Hundrieser submitted a Noel-Levitz report dated April 18, 2012 to Northland Community and Technical College which analyzed the colleges enrollment planning. After visiting the campus and reviewing the enrollment process the team believes the following Noel Levitz recommendations should be revisited and implemented:

1. Realign the recruiter’s responsibilities to focus exclusively on recruiting new students and efforts related to recruiting new students. In addition, there likely needs to be a third recruiter who focuses on special populations (online, international, athletes, etc.) (p. 6).
2. Expand the ambassador program – There is a small tour guide or ambassador program in place which limits the number of days a student can come to campus for a tour and limits the number of job opportunities on-campus. Given work-study dollars are available, I recommend expanding this program to 10 tour guides per campus, making tours available two or three times a day, five days a week. When tours are not being offered, ambassadors can provide other office support (p.7).
3. Create an open house – Both campuses should host open house events to recruit new students and community members. The schedule for the open houses should be set by May1 for the upcoming academic year. I would recommend six open houses per year (3 at each campus) and offered at diverse times (one day, one evening, one Saturday) spread throughout the year (p. 8).
4. Host guidance counselor breakfasts – NCTC has very nice facilities. I was impressed. You need to show these facilities off by hosting guidance counselor or other key influencers to breakfast or lunches to share your story, build relationships, and expand your knowledge base of the great programs and services provided by NCTC. The recruiters need to coordinate this effort, but these events (likely one per term per

- campus) need to be highly supported by the administration and faculty leadership (p. 8).
5. Prescriptive approach – All national studies suggest student persistence is linked to a more prescriptive and intrusive approach. Students, regardless of age, are seeking advice and direct connection with ways to navigate the enrollment process from interest through completion. The college needs to consider ways to become more prescriptive and intentionally intrude in students' lives. One way the college could do this is through creating specific program-of-study sheets for each academic program. Some already have this, but program-of-study sheets need to be created for both a full-time and part-time sequencing, given the large number of students who enroll part-time. These program-of study sheets should also list a suggested order for course enrollment (p. 9).

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