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# Higher Education Enrollment Marketing

Student Profile Analysis  
Is Your Gateway to  
Financial Stability



All higher education institutions, whether public or private four-year universities, two-year community colleges, or vocational/technical schools, rely on enrollment for financial stability. Attracting the “right fit” students is the key to success, but few have the magic wand to identify the right students at the right moment, nor the crystal ball to share what the future may hold.

The ability to attract and retain the ideal students for your institution, now and into the future, is central to your institution’s livelihood and success.



# The Enrollment Cliff

It's a tough market out there

and the “enrollment cliff” looms large in the background. Here are the brutal facts that keep admissions professionals awake at night:

- College enrollment trends are already showing a steady decline
- Population trends tell us there are fewer and fewer potential students each year
- Constant attention to the rising cost of higher education means that students are questioning the value of a post-secondary degree or certification, delaying or forgoing college



# To combat declining enrollment trends,

higher education marketing departments are throwing significant dollars and energy into reaching all potential audiences.

They're casting wide nets hoping to catch the most fish rather than strategically placing lines in the water for their best-fit students. A more limited, strategic student target is a better, more efficient allocation of resources.

Unless your college marketing department has an unlimited budget (tell us if you find one!), we recommend you consider some immediate areas to target your ad buy spend for enrollment marketing. Work smarter, not harder, right?

Having worked with numerous colleges and universities, here are our recommendations for a more strategic student audience assessment.



# “Everyone” is Not Your Audience

Considering the financial constraints on admissions marketing, especially within the broader realm of college marketing, relying on such a broad strategy is akin to planting seeds in infertile soil—you expend resources only to discard more seeds than you harvest. More prospects, inquiries, and admitted students are only valuable if they turn into enrolled students and, thinking even bigger, successful alumni.

How can you make the biggest impact you need based on the budget you have?

## Conduct an audience analysis.

Stop spending resources on prospects who are anything less than the ideal or are less likely to graduate from your institution.



# Audience Analysis

## The Game Changer

An audience analysis identifies the demographics, psychographics, and other notable attributes of your right-fit students. Use that insight to allocate the college admissions marketing budget most effectively and target prospects you want to receive your message.

College administration often says, “We know our student audience,” but do you really know them? Have you actively tracked their change throughout the past few years? We promise you; they have changed – sometimes significantly.



In an audience analysis, it's important to look at

# 3

key criteria to inform your marketing efforts.



## Criteria #1

# Current Student Profile.

Start with what you have and what you know. And don't begin with what you *think* you know.

That's dangerous and could contribute to lackluster results from your current marketing efforts. Be honest in this part of the process and stay away from who you aspire to attract. Think of the past 18-24 months and ask:

- Where do our students come from?
  - Have we noticed any emerging patterns between students from private or public schools? Are more non-traditional students enrolling? What's the geographic range from which your students come (e.g. 10 miles; 50 miles)? Are there "hot pockets" where you are seeing a high concentration of incoming students?
  - Keep in mind, happy students spread the word, and it's common to see connections from the same school or region.
- What is the socio-economic profile of our students?
- How many of our current students are athletes?
- What areas of interest/clubs do our current students participate in (e.g. arts programs, computer programs, etc.)?
- What are current students declaring as their major? What is dwindling? What is growing?
- What is the grade point average of our current high school or transfer students applying to our school?
- Are we seeing interest/admissions from professionals? If so, from what industry?
- What do website visits (pages, duration, engagement rate) tell us? NOTE: This dive into your site will give you helpful awareness on whether it's the cost, the type of degrees/certificates offered, or learning environment in which they are interested, in addition to myriad other insights.

Much of this information is at your Admissions Department's fingertips. In other cases, you may need to gather data from your student government leadership, academic affairs, or others at your institution.



## Criteria #2

# Ideal Student Profile.

This is where you can become a bit more aspirational.

Based on your current degrees and programs offered, who would be the ideal student to fill those seats (online or in person)? You can base some of this information on what you know from the current student profile to better understand which of your students succeed, and then dig deeper.



Though it's the job as university admissions counselors to welcome all students who apply, for your college to remain credible and financially stable, you need to identify your *ideal* students.

While you can be open to all applicants, being knowledgeable about the students most likely to thrive, graduate, and go on to successful next steps is in everyone's best interest.

It's important to recognize that not everyone is – or should be – your ideal student. Consider these questions:

- What type of student is most profitable for you? (e.g. online students, transfer students, traditional students, nursing majors, student athletes?)
- What are the common threads for those students who stay engaged and on track to graduate? (e.g. those in 2+ clubs? Athletes with playing time? Those who live on campus?)
- What questions do students ask during the enrollment process? (e.g. What are the resident halls like? How is the food on campus?)
- Where are you seeing the most hits on your website? (e.g. arts? athletics? business? graphic design?)
- What are the certificates or degrees that are attracting the most interest?
- With what schools do you see the most cross-applications or transfer activity (both to and from your institution)?

This insight carries significant value. Even if you don't employ the next tactic to identify the future student profile, you will still be well ahead of 90 percent of most colleges. Many admission marketing departments forge ahead without this understanding, often resorting to dipping into endowments, cutting programs, and laying off staff – and in some instances, closing.

## Criteria #3

# Future Student Profile.

Now, with the insight from the previous step, make a game plan to capture more of those potential right-fit or aspirational students by making sure you have what they want for your next college admissions cycle.

Ensure you understand your current student and ideal student profile as you look to the future. It is possible to impact your enrollment funnel and financial position within just a few months.

As an example, a client of ours moved quickly on new certificates and degrees and positively influenced their incoming class for the following semester, helping meet aggressive annual enrollment goals.



# Market, market, market.

You've gained some great insight, but  
now what do you do with it?



# Use it to your advantage and market more directly and personally to your target audience(s).

Performing an audience analysis means identifying your ideal prospect and adapting your marketing messages and tactics to their level, needs, attitudes, and beliefs. The goal is to deepen the relationship between you and your future students because you can speak more directly to their interests and motivators. You may have fewer in your pool, but this is quality over quantity.

## Better Targeting With Digital

Strategically placed billboards, television commercials, and radio advertising all have a place in branding and awareness-building efforts. More targeted strategies assist in volume-driving efforts. For the highest level of segmentation, analytics, and meaningful conversion, there is no better solution available than targeted digital advertising.

Through many digital platforms, you can directly target your ideal students based on age, expressed interests, psychographics, and geography, among many other criteria.

The reporting and analytics available provide insight to optimize your digital marketing spend and leverage across other non-digital activities. (If you aren't actively analyzing your audiences and determining ways to become relevant and market to them, you are falling behind.)

While all higher education institutions are facing similar challenges, you can respond by more actively targeting prospects and positively influencing your institution. The status quo no longer works in a more competitive landscape for student acquisition and retention. An audience assessment is the first step in identifying, communicating, and enrolling your "best fit" students.



This is not for the faint of heart, and does take strong, vocal, and inspirational leadership at all levels to row in the same direction. It also takes openness by faculty and staff to take on the changes needed to move in the right direction.





# Chartwell Agency specializes in education marketing

and can provide insight to university presidents, academic affairs offices, college admissions professionals, advancement and marketing departments, and others to assist in facilitation and training, marketing campaigns, public relations, and digital marketing as well as how to make the impact to move your higher education institution forward.

If we can assist you or if you'd like to delve deeper through a conversation, we'd love to chat.

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