



Strategic Best Practices

Carnegie

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CARNEGIE

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Introduction

WHAT IS INSIDE THIS DOCUMENT?

In an era marked by rapid advancements in technology, evolving demographics, and shifting student preferences, enrollment management has become increasingly complex and critical for the success of educational institutions. This document serves as a guide for our Carnegie team to feel knowledgeable in different facets of enrollment and marketing best practices to help serve our clients seeking to optimize their enrollment strategies and navigate the challenges of recruiting and retaining students in an ever-changing landscape.

Within these pages, you will find a wealth of insights, strategies, and practical tips distilled from Carnegie's industry expertise. The information is broken down into audience sections to explore the unique characteristics of each audience, enrollment goals often associated with that audience, best practices, and FAQs.

We recognize that every institution is unique, with its own distinct mission, goals, and student population. Therefore, while this document provides overarching best practices, we encourage you to adapt and tailor the strategies to align with your client's specific context and objectives.

As we embark on this journey together, let us embrace innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to student success. By embracing best practices and continuously refining our approaches, we can ensure that higher education remains accessible, inclusive, and transformative for all who seek knowledge and opportunity.

Traditional Undergraduate Students

KEY DIFFERENTIAL FACTORS

What are the characteristics that make this group different from other groups?

Who is this group?

- ❖ High school aged
- ❖ Used to polarizing culture & politics– asks questions about their college experience unlike any other before
- ❖ Most guaranteed audience and most inundated
- ❖ Have social media – digital natives; video medium is received well
- ❖ Increased distrust in higher education or view as less valuable than before
- ❖ Diverse in every respect

What is important to them?

- ❖ Proximity and/or location of college
- ❖ Finances – tuition, financial aid, scholarships, cost of living
- ❖ Seek parent/family/counselor support and input; peer opinion matters
 - Student-athletes will also be influenced by peers
- ❖ Mental health & wellness focus – students need amenities
- ❖ Important to “do the right thing” – value alignment in college choice
 - DEI efforts, safety for themselves and other marginalized groups
- ❖ Personalized communications are important; want a curated experience
- ❖ Trying new things and seeing more places, with an openness to transferring schools if necessary

What should we think about when marketing to these students or creating enrollment strategies?

- ❖ Students are looking for experience, parents are looking for value
- ❖ Shrinking audience and changing demographic means increased competition

- ❖ Buyer/seller dynamic shift– students and families feel that they are the decision makers– they want to be sold and want a good deal (more in the private sector)
- ❖ More open to options beyond 4 year institution; trade school, community college
- ❖ Tends to take action stealthily– increase in stealth inquiries and apps
- ❖ Non-traditional is becoming the new traditional (a path to a 4-year institution is becoming less of the norm); life is less linear
 - Social media plays a big role in students wanting to transfer
 - Student athletes + COVID created many non-traditional experiences, extended stays at one institution, etc.

HOW CARNEGIE CAN HELP

What problems or goals does this audience come to Carnegie to solve?

- ❖ Personalized and frictionless experience – show best fit
 - Segmentation can answer a “how” rather than a “what”
- ❖ Building brand awareness in key markets
- ❖ Start communication earlier and to be one of the first schools in front of the student
- ❖ Visit campus or attend an event
- ❖ Meet student expectations with limited staff or institutional resources
- ❖ Enrollment metrics – funnel stage quantities and rates. Growth YoY
- ❖ Anti-melt & retention
- ❖ Authenticity in messaging; building trust with students
- ❖ Heavy recruitment focus – make sure info is clear, concise, well-timed, and barrier-free and proactive
- ❖ Training staff to recruit and travel
- ❖ Becoming more selective
- ❖ Continued Diversity in post SCOTUS affirmative active world
- ❖ Focus on revenue
- ❖ Hard for clients to articulate goals
- ❖ Recruiters need help to understand the marketing mindset

FAQ

Here are the most frequently asked questions from the client side or Carnegie side about this group.

This is for internal use only; answers should now be copied and pasted to a client.

What are other schools experiencing? What are other schools doing? How are they building their pipeline?

Share what you know! What are your other schools doing? Generally, we see successful institutions have year-round always-on efforts that are diversified— in their marketing platform mix (email, digital, print, etc.) and in their lead generation (search name purchases, CX, etc.).

What are others seeing for app, visit, enrollment trends?

This will definitely depend on the time of year. Our Digital and Slate Communications teams have benchmarking dashboards that can help answer these types of questions.

- *Digital Benchmarking Dashboard*
- *[Slate Communications Benchmarking Data Request Form](#)*

How much should I spend on digital? And how do I prove ROI/attribution of digital spend? What are others spending? How many names are they buying?

How do we communicate with students and their parents?

The first challenge of parent communication is getting their contact information. More and more lead acquisition sites are also offering parent contact information, but we also recommend asking student prospects and inquiries to share their parent/guardian's information with us via an RFI form. From there, email campaigns for parents of inquiries, applicants, admits, and deposits are key to aid student decision making. Additionally, print pieces, whether sent to the student or addressed to "the family of so-and-so" will likely get in the hands of at least one parent, so print is a great way to connect with parents/guardians about what matters to them— financial aid, safety, ROI, etc.

What ideas do you have? What new tactic should we try?

Our teams will always have new, innovative ideas to try, and the ideas we share with our clients should be customized to their goals. Ask the project team first about their ideas for the client based on their knowledge of the scope of work and client nuances. The Circle of Strategy slack channel is another great place to go to ask for new ideas and tactics.

Are students listening? How can you prove that?

Identify comparable institutions and share metrics to assure clients.

BEST PRACTICES

Communications Flow Strategy

- ❖ Utilizing populations & drip campaign functionality
- ❖ Segmenting for personalization
- ❖ Measure and review regularly
- ❖ Timing and frequency
- ❖ Brand consistency
- ❖ Plan ahead and document
- ❖ Messages between email, comms, digital, and print are coordinated (similar themes, calls to action, etc..)
- ❖ Diversify medium
- ❖ Break out by audience for best performance (prospects, inquiries, parents)

❖ Don't:

Over communicate and spam students or communicate to opt-outs

Print

- ❖ Brand consistency

- ❖ Determine who is most important to send print to and who is not necessary (being strategic on print spend)
- ❖ Make sure print materials meet a minimum ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirement
- ❖ Assure print is being timely launched relative to electronic efforts

❖ **Don't:**

Bulky/large viewbooks are out. Too much to consume for this audience.

Web

- ❖ Brand consistency
- ❖ Easy to use
- ❖ Concise RFI easily accessible
- ❖ Fast load time
- ❖ Make this a priority– most important marketing piece
- ❖ Mobile friendly
- ❖ Utilize the homepage to promote timely recruitment information throughout the cycle (open house, app deadlines, financial aid deadlines, etc.)
- ❖ Admit portal for highly personalized experience
- ❖ Copy is easy to read, written at a high school reading level, and structured for scanning

❖ **Don't:**

Have multiple clicks to get to important info (application, RFI form, visit page, etc.)

Digital Presence

- ❖ Brand consistency
- ❖ Diversify tone based on platform, purpose, etc.
- ❖ Reactive - retargeting
- ❖ Video based platforms for maximum engagement

- ❖ Focus on the first couple of seconds of the video
- ❖ List-based/geo-based targeting for individual messaging or dart-based messaging
- ❖ Ensure leads are falling into email campaigns promptly
- ❖ Have an organic presence (like a website for social)
- ❖ A/B test
- ❖ Incorporate student-created content that's relatable
- ❖ Use rankings, if applicable
- ❖ Ensure landing page experience is optimized so they don't just click on ad and leave
- ❖ Always keep retargeting and PPC on
- ❖ Overall, make their experience as engaging, enticing, and frictionless as possible
- ❖ Stay on top of trends
- ❖ Update lists bi-weekly/monthly to weed out people who have already taken the desired action

❖ **Don't:**

Run the same ads for too long

Expect digital to solve yield/melt issues

Overload them with information or frequency of ads

Run image ads on video-based platforms, unless it is a trend

"Set and forget"

Email

- ❖ Brand consistency
- ❖ Diversify tone based on medium, purpose, etc.
- ❖ Slate - utilize content blocks, merge fields, and liquid markup to personalize campaigns based on information we know about these students
- ❖ Include how you obtained a student's contact info in initial search communications to be more credible and transparent (sometimes this is legal requirement)

- ❖ Create an auditing process to identify incorrect emails (format issues, spelling errors, etc.) and routinely clean up emails for better send rates. At the end of cycle, do a refresh process to update any populations and specific references in emails.
- ❖ Monitor performance metrics regularly and optimize campaigns as necessary
- ❖ Utilize drip campaign functionality to serve communications in a timely fashion
- ❖ Follow CAN-SPAM rules to increase deliverability & maintain sender reputation

❖ **Don't:**

Over Communicate & spam.

"Set and forget" - Don't just set up a campaign and let it go without checking in on performance and feedback.

Social Media

- ❖ Brand consistency
- ❖ Review data/engagement frequently
- ❖ Being engaging with audience
- ❖ Answer questions/messages promptly
- ❖ Use a variety of mediums: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok etc.
- ❖ Diversify types of posts/content (utilize stories, posts ads, etc.).
- ❖ Utilize student-generated content
- ❖ Post frequently
- ❖ Stay on top of trends
- ❖ Monitor comments

❖ **Don't:**

Over Post

Text Messaging

- ❖ Brand consistency
- ❖ Diversify tone based on purpose
- ❖ Include video links for better open rates
- ❖ Ask for permission to text via email /form to maintain A2P verifications
- ❖ Be thoughtful about purpose of text messages– most successful efforts are action-driven and coming personally from a staff assigned counselor

❖ Don't:

Over Communicate & spam

Data and Analytics

- ❖ Set high standard for data integrity
- ❖ Regularly review what and how data enters CRM
- ❖ Set up reporting practices early and update each cycle
- ❖ Utilize Slate's (or other CRM) query library to standardize filters for funnel reports and geographic markets
- ❖ Create easy reports to measure ROI efforts across all marketing initiatives (include expenses of each source if possible for a cost per student view)

Timelines

- ❖ Consistent application/enrollment deadlines & policies year over year
- ❖ Establish comm plans which clearly communicate application timeline and deadlines
- ❖ Our general recommendation is to launch senior search in August, underclassmen search in November, yield in December/January, anti melt in March

New Program Selection

- ❖ Complete research to determine what's in demand versus what's 'trending' or what

interests faculty members have to select new majors/programs.

Search Strategy

- ❖ Clearly define your primary, secondary, and tertiary markets
- ❖ Create/review historical data for academics (GPA/SAT/ACT), socioeconomic (median income of applicant pool and enrolled class), and other demographics to align with institution's profile
- ❖ Assure College Board Connections is configured and implemented for underclass search
- ❖ Utilize College Board services to strategically target students (IMC, IMP, Segment Analysis Service, Landscape Context, etc.)
- ❖ Create a student campaign, but also a parent campaign with data available from search vendors
- ❖ Purchase and message underclassmen as early as possible to build brand-awareness
- ❖ Purchase search names monthly to assure you refresh the population
- ❖ Track origin sources and ROI for each search vendor and search segment

❖ Don't:

Restrict budget and order only senior names - underclassmen search is critical

Purchase infrequently or only a few times a year

Market Expansion

- ❖ Complete research to determine highest potential markets before investing money in new markets

❖ Don't:

Assume a new market will happen in one or two cycles - it will require time, money, and complimentary marketing efforts to expand into new markets

Transfer Students

KEY DIFFERENTIAL FACTORS

What are the characteristics that make this group different from other groups?

Who is this group?

- ❖ A transfer student is anyone who attended any institution of higher education (on any basis, for any length of time) following graduation from high school. A transfer student can be someone with any of the following backgrounds:
 - 2-year community colleges
 - Other 4-year institutions
 - “Returners,” i.e., coming back as an adult
 - International Students
 - Non-degree-seeking students
 - Graduate students
 - Previous active military members
 - Dual-enrolled high school students (transfer-adjacent)

What is important to them?

- ❖ Transparency and timeliness
- ❖ Cost and financial aid
- ❖ Credit transfers, to make sure their courses seamlessly transfer; credit equivalencies should be very visible
- ❖ Flexibility of course offerings and modalities if they are working and attending school at the same time, i.e. they may want to finish at their own pace
- ❖ Sense of belonging or “fit” (previous – often negative – experiences can factor in here)
- ❖ Location
- ❖ Faster application timelines and, in general, “just in time” communications
- ❖ For student-athletes, coaches and athletics could play a vital role

What should we think about when marketing to these students or creating enrollment strategies?

- ❖ Transfer students are stealthy during the search process – many will apply directly in lieu of requesting information or visiting campus first
- ❖ The time of sending applications in can be right up to the first day of classes
- ❖ It's hard to identify a transfer student (for ad targeting, etc.) until they self-identify via RFI form or application
- ❖ Brand recognition is important because transfer students are often looking at a smaller set of schools
- ❖ Transfer students are better off talking to a person compared to being bombarded with emails because they have more specific questions, but there should be some element of self-service, i.e., transfer evals
- ❖ Transfer-specific scholarships
- ❖ Market research
- ❖ Word-of-mouth marketing can make an impact (“A friend from high school went there...”)
- ❖ Shift perception of transfer students to how many more students may transfer from a two-year to a four-year school, compared to previous enrollment cycles

HOW CARNEGIE CAN HELP

What problems or goals does this audience come to Carnegie to solve?

- ❖ The admissions process needs to feel seamless and straightforward
- ❖ Transfer students need to feel welcomed and comfortable in their new environment (if a student is coming from another 4-year institution, they may have had a bad experience)
- ❖ Dedicated support and events to handle their questions and help with the transfer process
 - Transfer-specific events on campus – i.e., financial aid, credit transfers, program-specific, etc.
- ❖ Internal support for schools attracting students who have veteran-specific financial aid questions or prior learning credit for military training, school, or certifications
- ❖ Community college partnerships for the 2-year to 4-year college students
- ❖ Financial aid and cost transparency

- ❖ Understand how they might be able to balance school and life, for example if they are supporting a family or continue to work (ex., online course work, information about flexibility)
- ❖ Make sure (as many as possible) courses can be transferred over to relieve stress from student
- ❖ Partnerships with employers covering tuition (tactic: targeting specific employers digitally)

FAQ

Here are the most frequently asked questions from the client side or Carnegie side about this group. This is for internal use only; answers should not be copied and pasted to a client.

Do transfer students need a separate marketing plan (i.e. communications, digital, the works) from first-year students? And, if so, do specific transfer audiences then need their own marketing plans?

- *100%; depending on the age and life experiences of the transfer student, they may be very uninterested in student life and belonging-related campus resources; they will be more likely to live off-campus and/or have a family*
- *I'd want to know what kind of degree programs are offered at the institution, which ones already have a lot of transfer student- traction, and identify the transfer-friendly ones*
- *Transfer students may expect more precise academic language than traditional undergraduates.*
- *ROI will be more important/pressing/top-of-mind to transfer students than traditional FY students*
- *There is also a subset of the transfer population that is more traditional FY-aged (going to community college for one or two semesters for an easier transition to college life, etc.)*
- *Timelines/deadlines are often different both from an admission decision perspective as well as when students actually start applying. Spring transfer students generally have an expedited timeline given short turn around for transfer credit evaluations in addition to many campuses being closed during the winter break.*
- *Does the institution have partnerships with local companies who offer tuition remission benefits? If these students are utilizing tuition reimbursement, they will be going part-time and taking one – at most two – classes a semester.*

- *Institutions should market to previously admitted/non-enrolled first-year students that went to a 2-year college first. Clearinghouse data can be pulled and imported to Slate to target this population for recruitment as transfers.*

What is the best way to get transfer students to "raise their hand" on the website, so that we can start retargeting and/or advertising to them?

The main tactics would be a clear, well-placed Request for Information (RFI) form in the sitewide header and on academic program pages and then clear calls to action (CTAs) on transfer pages (again, an RFI, but also apply and visit). If an institution has a large or growing transfer population, they can also include a dedicated component for transfer students on their academic program pages.

- *Transfer students are often intentional with their search, looking to maximize credit transfer opportunities. Promoting transfer credit evaluation solutions like Transferology or other in-house platforms could help schools identify students early.*
- *Flexibility in course day/time offerings, especially for non-trad transfers.*
- *Focus on affordability and financing their education, point to the institution's net price calculator and scholarship resources.*
- *Connect them with current students or grads who have impressive stories (outcomes, internships that lead to jobs, etc.), ROI is top of mind.*
- *Point them to campus support services like transfer organizations, transfer housing/commuter options, on- and off-campus employment opportunities, transfer orientation, etc.*
- *Highlighting campus visit and virtual counselor options for information options.*

BEST PRACTICES

Communications Flow Strategy & Email

- ❖ Focus on transferability and cost
- ❖ Make sure there is one and that it's separate from first-time students
- ❖ Include direct links to the transfer equivalency database
- ❖ Highlight the application
- ❖ Build up transfer testimonials

- ❖ Intake based by semester, not by year
- ❖ Add segmentation where appropriate - etc. Veterans, international, 2-year to 4-year, 4-year to 4-year, and more

❖ Don't:

Include them on comms that cater more to the typical first-time freshman

Treat their comms calendar as the same cycle as the first time

Print

- ❖ Develop 'transfer guides' for community college partners
- ❖ Publish said ^ guides on the web, so web versions match print for consistency
- ❖ Make sure they meet a minimum ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirement
- ❖ Tested with focus groups for readability ("UX")
- ❖ Reference the web database as the most up-to-date info
- ❖ Add print postcards to communications plan
- ❖ Have iterative viewbooks for transfer population

❖ Don't:

Make it too complicated

Web

- ❖ Searchable catalog of equivalencies
- ❖ Navigation is seamless and transfer-friendly
- ❖ Dedicated web space for transfer students (make the UX clear)
- ❖ Make sure you retarget the transfer page
- ❖ Include Guest Student links on the transfer page for those students attending for only one semester
- ❖ Copy should be written at a high school reading level, and structured for quick scanning
- ❖ <https://www.nists.org/post/transfer-website-strategy-guide> (guide for how to create a transfer-centered website)

❖ Don't:

Treat all transfer audiences as the same

Digital Presence

- ❖ Dedicated search landing page
- ❖ Geofencing or location targeting
- ❖ Use a Customer Data Platform (CDP) for website personalization on the transfer page
- ❖ Make sure you retarget the transfer page
- ❖ Include transfer groups, if applicable, within social media channels (social media-specific)
- ❖ Match your first-time recruitment business model (text messaging-specific)
- ❖ Check to see if withdrawal/cancellation form is capturing data to re-engage later (data analytics-specific)

❖ Don't:

Group this audience into the traditional UG campaigns due to budget

Operations

- ❖ Provide clear requirements as to transfer eligibility, credit transfer guidelines, next steps and FAQ
- ❖ Maximize TCAT (Transfer Credit Articulation) agreements
- ❖ Consider official transfer evaluations only after a student applies; unofficial evals can be done using the web database

❖ Don't:

Hide credit transfer guidelines

Pair TCAT paywalling with no information

Hide the next steps if a student disagrees with their evaluation

Transfer Credits

- ❖ Identify on the transfer page - what the credit equivalency process is, rights to appeal credit, where previous evaluations can be found (if at all), any articulation agreements in place as well as what sources **cannot** be used as credit
 - Info about CLEP exams, ACE credit, etc.

www.insidehighered.com/news/students/academics/2024/02/28/new-report-shows-transfers-rising-among-disadvantaged-groups

Graduate Students

KEY DIFFERENTIAL FACTORS

What are the characteristics that make this group different from other groups?

Who is this group?

Unlike traditional undergraduate students, there are several distinct types of graduate students. These distinctions are based primarily on the students' values, educational experience, and desired outcomes for their graduate program. When working with a graduate client, it is crucial to identify which type of student the client hopes to recruit.

- ❖ The Academic - A continuous learner who is driven by knowledge
 - Values competitiveness and institutional reputation
 - Interested in working with world-class faculty
 - Likely has a research focus or plans to move into academics as a profession
- ❖ The Undergraduate - Current undergraduate student looking to immediately advance to a graduate program
 - Little to no workforce experience
 - Larger educational debt
 - Desires advanced employment opportunities after upon program completion
- ❖ The Career Climber - A working adult with an outcomes-focused motivation

- Seeks increased promotional ability or income with an advanced degree
- Desires convenience features like a hybrid, part-time, or asynchronous programs
- More likely to have an established career and/or family

What is important to them?

- ❖ Program outcomes related to career advancement are critical to this audience. Whether it is a career change or a promotional opportunity, career shifts are the primary motivations for this group.
- ❖ Prospective graduate students tend to put more weight in the graduate programs' reputation than that of the institution itself.

What should we think about when marketing to these students or creating enrollment strategies?

- ❖ Identifying potential graduate audiences presents inherent challenges. These can be alleviated by understanding your audiences' typical attributes, strategic planning on how to reach them, and advanced sophistication in the tools used.
- ❖ Graduate audiences do not often have set timelines
- ❖ Almost every strategy will be program-specific as prospective grad students search by a narrow list of programs rather than by institution
- ❖ Students coming back to school while in their career are also looking for opportunities to highlight on their resume
- ❖ Proper discovery is needed to understand each client's specific graduate demographics and level of competitiveness to ensure effective strategy
- ❖ Whether the client has a centralized graduate recruitment office or if recruitment is run by faculty will present wildly different needs for them as a client
- ❖ Collecting program-level data on graduate students is very difficult leading to further issues in creating communication or marketing strategies. Program-level data collection is essential at the graduate level. Without it, targeting and segmentation are severely limited.
- ❖ Centralized graduate offices with marketing expertise require different approaches than individual schools unfamiliar with recruitment
- ❖ There is a difference between communicating with competitive vs open-enrollment programs

HOW CARNEGIE CAN HELP

What problems or goals does this audience come to Carnegie to solve?

- ❖ Graduate clients can loosely be categorized as competitive programs or open-enrollment “right-to-try” programs.
 - A competitive graduate program will likely have goals based on the academic quality and professional experience of their incoming class, in addition to a bottom-line enrollment goal. While seeking diversity in a traditional DEI sense, these programs hope to recruit candidates with work experience in a specific industry, company, or sector.
 - An open-enrollment “right-to-try” graduate program will generally seek headcount over academic or professional quality. This does not mean that the client does not care about these factors, it is simply less of a guiding light in their recruitment process. Applicants who meet minimum qualifications will generally be accepted into a program.
- ❖ Understand client goals when it comes to graduate programs
 - Are they looking for as many students to enroll as possible or are they looking for help with recruitment efforts of highly qualified candidates?

FAQ

Here are the most frequently asked questions from the client side or Carnegie side about this group. This is for internal use only; answers should now be copied and pasted to a client.

I have limited SEO resources, where should I focus my energy?

Program pages!

Should I gate important information behind an RFI to promote conversion?

No. This audience needs this information to determine if they even want to inquire.

What do I do when I have a faculty member with strong opinions that go against best practices ex: long emails?

Encourage best practices that are based on data to demonstrate expertise and build trust.

We have limited dollars, how do we prioritize what program to promote?

Our partners use different criteria to make these decisions, including selecting the programs that contribute the most revenue, promoting well-regarded programs that build the institution's reputation, or supporting programs where enrollment has recently declined yet demand in the job market persists. Additionally, our team can help provide insights into where dollars go farthest in the digital space programmatically. Make sure you have a solid general landing page if you are going to move away from a programmatic approach!

How much do we spend on digital compared to our peers?

- ❖ *For full time, in-person programs, the decision cycle is often quite long. Prospective students may go from inquiry to applicant within three or so months of the deadline, but they likely already had a short list of programs/institutions well in advance of that, in some cases they could be considering programs a year before self-identifying.*
- ❖ *For open-enrollment programs, especially those with multiple starts per year, we recommend PPC (Pay Per Click) and Display Retargeting as an always-on strategy with other tactics layered in around key recruitment periods based on your historical admissions data.*
- ❖ *For paid digital, Carnegie can provide data in terms of spend among institution size (small, medium, or large) and type (public or private) but not among a specific set of peer institutions. A challenge with this question is that most schools are underspending on Grad compared to what we would say is the minimum needed to really move the needle.*

What are best practices around graduate recruitment admissions structures? Centralized, decentralized? Who "owns" recruitment and communications? The college versus a graduate admissions office?

- ❖ *When possible, a centralized office is the most efficient/effective. In decentralized settings, individual schools within the same institution can actually begin competing with each other in the same space and lack brand cohesion.*
- ❖ *In terms of "owning" recruitment, that can largely depend on how faculty contracts are structured and if there is an incentive to recruit, communicate and advise. Regardless of who does it, it needs to be done! The worst thing is a RFI form that goes to a generic college email address that no one is checking!*

BEST PRACTICES

Communications Flow Strategy

- ❖ Send initial contact from the graduate recruiter ASAP (39% of students expect a response within 3 hours)
 - ❖ Limit graduate communication frequency to once per week at the absolute most
 - ❖ Content should be written for adults; the mean age of a graduate seeking student is 31 years old
 - ❖ Utilize segmentation appropriately to provide a level of customization that gives prospective students the information they need (often prospective students are interested in a certain graduate program and need to hear details about that program within regular communications)
 - ❖ Consider messaging and what is important information for the prospective student to receive and how this differs from the traditional undergraduate students
-
- ❖ **Don't:**
Don't keep relevant admissions information locked behind an RFI or make it incredibly long

Print

- ❖ Only 15% of graduate students prefer print, so use sparingly

Web

- ❖ SEO is essential on program pages because these pages drive organic traffic and are often the entry point to the client website
 - ❖ Consider timeline for enrollment when developing communication plan strategy. If anticipated entry term is multiple semesters out, consider having a separate comm plan for these inquiries so that you can communicate at a different cadence and with a different tone. Since entry term is often more fluid with grad, consider still making softer pushes to apply for further out terms or offering option to update anticipated entry term.
 - ❖ Make it easy to find graduate-specific support services and amenities; ensure the website includes content specific to the grad student experience
-
- ❖ **Don't:**
Hide relevant details like prerequisites, tuition costs, and course requirements because users will leave if they have to look too hard

Digital Presence

- ❖ Highlight individual graduate programs and drive users to dedicated, program-specific landing pages
 - ❖ Program outcomes (related to career advancement) are attractive as well as program rankings and alumni connections in most instances
 - ❖ Ensure brand consistency between the institution and the individual school/college that houses the program
 - ❖ Promptly respond to inquiries with comm flows that align with the program of interest
 - ❖ The prospective graduate student audience is narrower than the undergraduate audience, so define the target audience by understanding their interests and previous educational and professional experience
 - ❖ Metrics on appropriate depends available by discipline/program
 - ❖ Clarity is great low-cost option to personalize content for prospective graduate students making information and next steps more tangible for grad students visitings a school's site
-
- ❖ **Don't:**
 - Use images of undergrad students when recruiting for a grad program, especially a professional graduate program
 - Broadly promote the graduate school if recruitment, rather than reputation, is your goal

Operations

- ❖ Determine on the front end of a project who will be involved in the approval process. Especially with graduate clients, there could be sign-off needed from several administrators and faculty members prior to approving a project
-
- ❖ **Don't:**
 - Jeopardize your own deadlines because a client bottleneck if you can avoid it

Data and Analytics

- ❖ During implementation, be sure to discuss with the client the ways they hope to segment and report for graduate specific segments and encourage the data setup accordingly
- ❖ At the beginning of a contract, getting access to a GA4 (Google Analytics 4)/organic traffic

behavior or other digital campaigns used before Carnegie would allow a baseline for a strong measure of success

❖ **Don't:**

Be surprised if you have a graduate client saying something like “we do not have the data to segment like this.” You might need to be scrappy to figure out how to target the right audience

Timelines

- ❖ Related to operations, but graduate offices tend to have approval bottlenecks. Be sure to account for these
- ❖ Understand your cycle. Competitive programs typically have much longer decision windows than open-enrollment programs even though both tend to see prospective students self-identify a few months before a deadline.

Top Motivator

- ❖ Determine if the target audience of each client is looking for career advancement (usually this) or academic advancement

Online Students

KEY DIFFERENTIAL FACTORS

What are the characteristics that make this group different from other groups?

Who is this group?

- ❖ Primarily students in the 4 year sector
- ❖ Independent learners who exhibit independence in their learning process
- ❖ Students come from different backgrounds - such as working professionals seeking career advancement, parents balancing family commitments, and students living in remote areas without access to traditional institutions
- ❖ This group values flexibility in their schedules trying to balance work, family, and life
- ❖ International students seeking degrees from accredited institutions
- ❖ Graduate students, although the pandemic and other factors have led to the proliferation of undergraduate online degrees

What is important to them?

- ❖ A degree that is flexible and convenient
- ❖ Motivations behind obtaining a degree can differ given campus life and benefits aren't necessarily as important
- ❖ Cost of degree
- ❖ Duration of time it takes to complete degree
- ❖ Access to online resources such as the library, writing center, networking events, mentors, internships, etc are important

What should we think about when marketing to these students or creating enrollment strategies?

- ❖ Some online students are not sure of the difference between a degree or the equivalent certification

- Prospective students will ask for clarification around the degree awarded and if there is a difference between the on-campus equivalent and online degree
- ❖ Some online students know exactly what they want out of an online degree
- ❖ Fully online graduate program students still want to feel like a community even though they are online
- ❖ Clear communication around the Online format (hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous, etc. and outlining the flexibility from the start, as defining these formats upfront is important from a content perspective

HOW CARNEGIE CAN HELP

What problems or goals does this audience come to Carnegie to solve?

- ❖ How to market against large online programs and how to differentiate from competitors
- ❖ Make sure the institution has a clear understanding of what it means to be a competitor
 - Competitor: the actual schools that have similar programs. (note: higher-ranked schools do not necessarily lose students to large online schools but their competitors are other well-known schools with similar programs)
- ❖ Heavy reliance on marketing as there is less opportunity to go in front of the audience at fairs or other in-person recruiting events
- ❖ Benchmarking for how a school compares to other schools
- ❖ How to example who can be communicate to and finding where these students are (as there is no way of purchasing names for students interested in online only)
- ❖ Put more emphasis on a student engagement once the student is enrolled (enrollment growth is currently focused on up-front and tapers off once a student starts)
- ❖ As an institution, understand where your students are coming from and if it's best to recruit nationally

FAQ

Here are the most frequently asked questions from the client side or Carnegie side about this group. This is for internal use only; answers should now be copied and pasted to a client.

What are the best support services or those services that online students will find most

useful?

Online students will benefit greatly from a range of support services. Many of them parallel what in-person students utilize, however the way those services are prioritized will be slightly different. Online students rely heavily on technology. 24/7 technical support ensures that any technical issues with LMS (Learning Management System), software, or access can be resolved quickly for them. This group of students will need access to digital libraries, research databases, e-books, and academic journal articles so that they can complete assignments effectively. At times, online students may require additional academic support to ensure they are making progress towards degree completion. Virtual tutoring services and academic advising sessions conducted remotely can assist with guidance on course selection, study strategies, and academic goals. One of the most important considerations is making sure there are accessibility services available. Provisioning accommodations for students with screen reader capabilities, captioning, alternative exam formats ensures that all students have equal access to educational/curriculum materials. Lastly, make sure there is a coordinated student financial services center that can answer questions related to important term start and end dates, financial aid assistance, and account balance payment options.

How do we engage online students and promote a sense of community?

1. Create an interactive learning environment (multimedia elements, interactive online simulations, etc.) and anything that can make the learning experience more engaging and dynamic.
2. Facilitate communication and encourage regular interaction among students and instructors. This can happen through discussion forums, check-in videos, and messaging platforms. Quick and prompt responses from instructors on inquiries from students promotes active participation and can help build a sense of online community and foster belonging.
3. Peer support networks or study groups can help students build identity, unity, and create a shared space where they can collaborate, share resources, and support each other academically and socially.
4. Organize virtual events, guest lectures, or webinars on topics related to student interest. This would be similar to co-curricular activities taking place on campus but it provides a forum for online students to participate, engage with experts and scholars, network with peers, and feel a part of institutional events while not on-campus.

BEST PRACTICES

Communications Flow Strategy

- ❖ Immediate follow-up/positive user experiences - if someone is looking to get a degree online, you don't want there to be lags/snags in online communication or phone calls
- ❖ Generic: flexibility, time to degree, cost - leverage brand and personality solution to differentiate from competitors (messaging/outcomes specific)
- ❖ Call and text message campaigns are important

Digital Presence

- ❖ Promoting Online Programs vs. General Online for both UG and Grad
- ❖ Communication plans (drip campaigns) that extend for a longer period. Online graduate programs tend to have a longer conversion cycle (email only)

Operations

- ❖ Need for a team on campus to be dedicated to supporting the Online audience including student advisors (this is a differentiator from many Oline Program Management (OPMs))

Data and Analytics

- ❖ Having robust systems to capture general enrollment (funnel) and revenue activity
- ❖ Student behavioral related data that could influence modeled actions (predicting applicants, enrollees, or retained students)

Timelines

- ❖ Capabilities (fall, spring, summer starts) influence key times to promote
- ❖ **Don't:**
Under Communicate term start and end date deadlines (or important dates). Online

programs often have flexible start and stop dates, so it is extremely important to let these students know the options they have as it relates to enrolling in these programs.

Imagery/Visuals

- ❖ What imagery do we use in communications across divisions? (digital, web, etc.)
 - ❖ Faculty and student spotlights tend to resonate well with the online grad audience - integrating within marketing and web could be a good differentiator
 - ❖ Campaign imagery/videos during on-campus immersions and placement sites (if applicable) capture online student and faculty audiences outside of just commencements
 - ❖ To stand out, leverage outcome-based imagery
-
- ❖ **Don't:**
 - Use on-campus images as a first choice (most universities include online programs in larger commencement ceremonies)