

FACULTY RESOURCES

Faculty Involvement in Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Anthony Schuette
Student Success Toolkit
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About Student Success Toolkits

The Student Success Toolkits from Trellis Strategies provide evidence-based recommendations for colleges and universities to improve student outcomes. The toolkits summarize the latest research in student success and outline practical steps for administrators and practitioners.

About Trellis Strategies

We are a strategic nonprofit research and consulting firm dedicated to advancing postsecondary education and strengthening the workforce by delivering unparalleled insights into the modern learner experience, from application through graduation. With over 40 years' experience serving higher education institutions and helping students navigate complex processes, we have the knowledge, insight, and experience to help organizations turn their data into action and action into results.

About the Author

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Faculty Involvement in Recruitment and Enrollment

As the number of options for post-secondary students continues to increase, post-secondary institutions are faced with staunch competition for these students in ever-broadening market conditions. Undoubtedly, one thing students want out of college, particularly in on-campus environments, is a sense of belonging. Peer-to-peer, student-faculty and student-staff relationships have been identified as foundational to student engagement, learning, belonging and success in higher education.^{1,2} In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many successful instructors made themselves increasingly available online to try and combat decreasing belongingness among their

students.³ Students value the interactions they have with their professors. Faculty can assist students in ways other university staff cannot. They can help students with skills and career development, and are knowledgeable in fields and professional circles most relevant to their students. It follows then, that communication and familiarity with these faculty members is paramount to student decision-making. Engaging in this process early, during the application and decision-making process, enables students to make informed decisions about their education and investment in themselves. It also works to build the sense of community that has been shown to be so valuable to student success.

Key recommendations



Involve faculty in the student recruitment process



Give faculty multiple outlets for participation



Faculty Influence

Research has examined the relationship between recruitment and faculty. Research often highlights the relationships students have with professors, the trust they are able to build, and their personification of academic programs as reasons for their ability to persuade prospective students to attend their institution.^{4,5} In a study of matriculating students at California State University, both matriculants and non-matriculants identified personal conversations with faculty among the most useful sources of information to their decision to attend or not attend CSU, alongside campus visits and student event participation on campus.⁶ Interaction with faculty and other prospective students has been shown to influence student's decision to apply for admission,⁷ and the perceived quality of faculty influences institution choice after admission.⁶ In fact, limited research suggests that faculty may have similar weight in a student's enrollment decision to the student's parents. A 2010 study found the influence of university faculty, staff or sports coaches on enrollment decisions to be marginally greater, on average, than the influence of parents.⁸ Furthermore, highly emotionally intelligent professors are more effective educators and increase student satisfaction.^{9,10}

For these reasons, many institutions have begun using faculty in the process of student recruitment. These institutions have placed a premium on creating relationships between faculty and prospective students. Many institutions have seen their potential gains realized in enrollment gains.

LIMITED RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT FACULTY MAY HAVE SIMILAR WEIGHT IN A STUDENT'S ENROLLMENT DECISION TO THE STUDENT'S PARENTS.



CASE STUDY

Evergreen State College

From 2011 to 2021, Evergreen State College's student body shrank by over 50 percent. Thus far in 2023, Evergreen State has grown its enrollment 23 percent, following a year of 14 percent growth in 2022. One change cited as instrumental to this turnaround is faculty involvement in the recruitment process. John Carmichael, president of Evergreen State, had this to say of the involvement of faculty in this process: "We were starting to see more applications

even before the pandemic, but what really moved significantly for us this year was yield, and I think faculty involvement at that stage in recruitment played a big part."¹¹ The plan emerged as a way to preserve faculty jobs in the face of such steep enrollment declines. Today, faculty contracts at Evergreen State now list recruitment calls and coordinator roles among ways for faculty to fulfill employment requirements.¹¹

Where to start?



Overall, the research highlighted in this review lends itself to a few important takeaways.

1

Involve faculty in student recruitment.

Enabling students to connect with their professors and mentors on a personal level before arriving on campus will aid them in making an informed decision about their education. This can take a variety of forms. Allowing prospective students to meet with faculty one-on-one or making them available during campus visits can help students begin to envision their experience in the classroom. Simply increasing the visibility of faculty on social media platforms, highlighting the work being done on campus and the community being fostered, can go a long way towards helping students see the way current students are included in learning environments around campus.

2

Prioritize personal connections as trust building exercises.

Obviously, academics are a large part of any student's decision to attend college. However, perhaps equally as important is "Am I going to be happy here?" Encouraging faculty to engage beyond the world of academics is a huge step towards making students feel welcome and valued, and builds trust between students and faculty. From there, getting buy in from students on the academic value of an institution only grows easier. Research has identified a link between highly emotionally intelligent faculty and student success.

3

Highlight what faculty does well and give them the option to choose to participate.

Faculty at any higher education institution are a busy group of individuals. What's more, faculty are not traditionally involved with marketing or recruitment, and as such may be reluctant to take on additional work in fields they are not familiar with. Keeping faculty informed of targets and overall recruitment planning, along with a general policy of transparency between faculty and the admissions and enrollment management offices will help maintain buy-in among faculty.⁵ Explaining the importance of building interpersonal relationships with prospective students may help faculty to realize the real influence and pull they have on students. That said, these faculty members are not marketers, so giving their initial interactions with prospective students structure can help them to understand their role. Encourage faculty to engage in areas they feel comfortable with. For instance, some may be comfortable with giving presentations on the work they do at admissions events while others may prefer written interviews. As Lauren Elrick writes in her helpful guide on the subject, "providing helpful guidance instead of commanding specific direction will bode well for marketing departments."¹²

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