

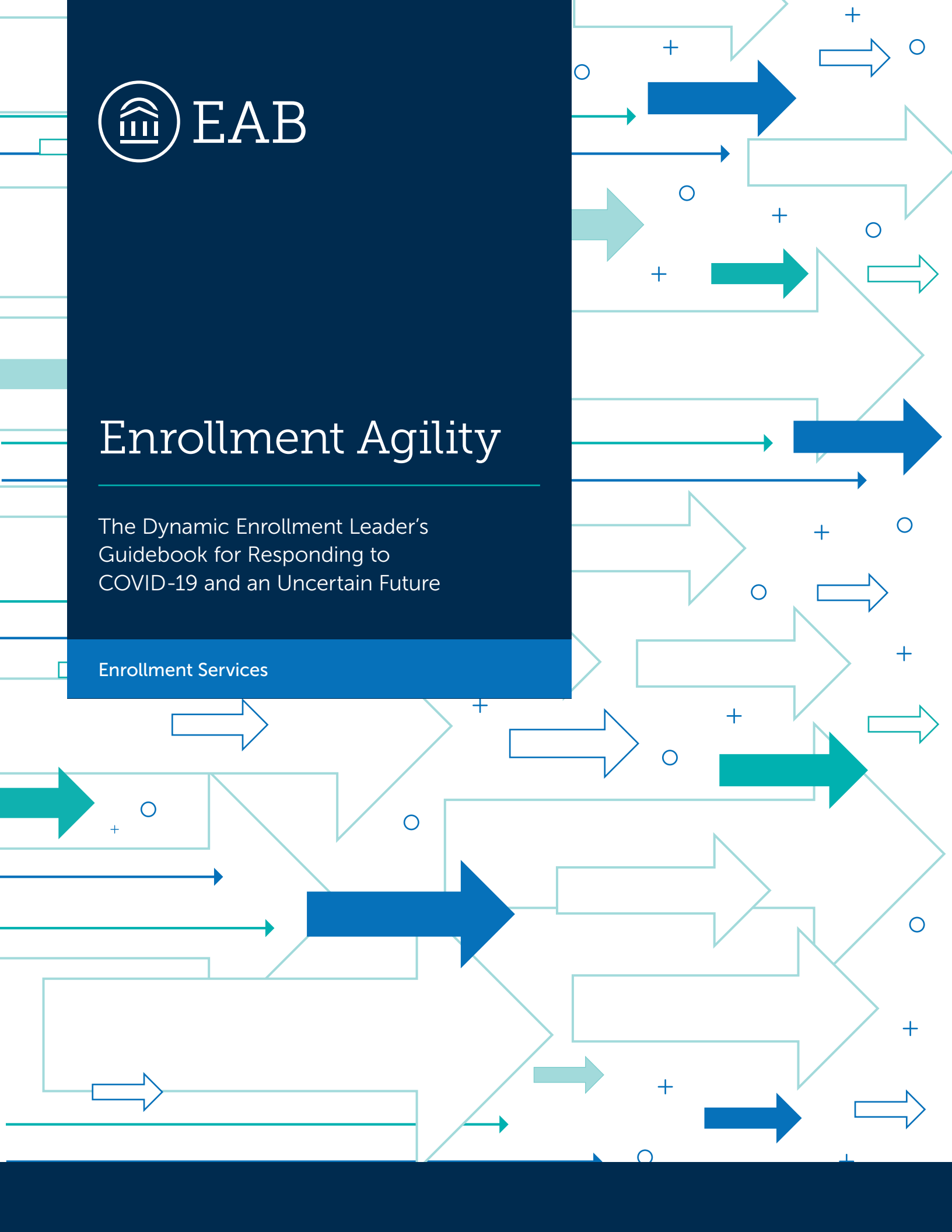


EAB

Enrollment Agility

The Dynamic Enrollment Leader's
Guidebook for Responding to
COVID-19 and an Uncertain Future

Enrollment Services



EAB Enrollment Services

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COVID-19: Accelerating Necessary Change

A Pandemic Meets the Demograph-Apocalypse

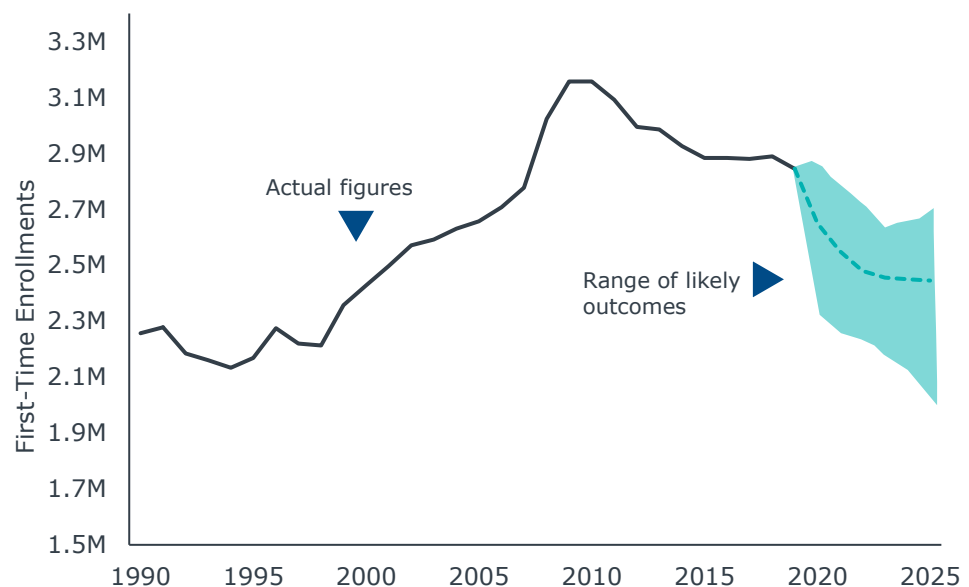
Prior to COVID-19, higher education enrollment leaders were adjusting their strategies and preparing their campuses for the sharp decline in prospective first-time freshmen set to hit the 2025-2026 school year. This “demographic cliff” was anticipated to usher in one of the greatest seasons of change higher education has experienced, even more so than the Great Recession.

Undergraduate enrollment leaders have been sounding the alarm to make strategic changes to position their colleges for success in new markets—both geographically and demographically.

Then, COVID-19 struck, accelerating the pace of change and forcing action from schools that had been slower to prepare for the student decline. This unexpected development will make hitting revenue goals even more difficult, and schools that were already struggling to meet enrollment goals prior to COVID-19 will face even greater threats as all institutions compete more aggressively across a smaller pool of students.

The Demographic Cliff Is Already Here

Number of first-time enrollments at 2-year and 4-year institutions, 1990-2025¹



Estimated range of inputs informing outcome*

- High school dropouts: 1.2M–2M
- Students delaying matriculation due to financial stress, preference for in-person instruction: 5-40%
- Long-term decline in attendance due to decreased consumer confidence: 1-3x 2008 recession impact

**Range of possibilities is not a statistical model.*

While the timeline has advanced significantly—a factor that should not be downplayed—the strategies and tactics needed to support student enrollment through COVID-19 are those that many colleges were already beginning to implement.

1) EAB projections included for years 2020 onward.

EAB recommends enrollment leaders explore exercises and tactics to build agility and resilience in their teams across three key areas.



At the forefront of an agile team is a dynamic leader. *Dynamic* can be defined in two ways:

1. When defining a process or system, *dynamic* means “characterized by constant change, activity, or progress.”
2. When defining a person, *dynamic* means “positive in attitude and full of energy and new ideas.”

The Economist perfectly captures the dynamic leader’s perspective on how COVID-19 is accelerating the pace of change across multiple industries:

“Optimists—and business folk tend to look on the bright side—see this acceleration as offering **new possibilities for reinvention, even resurrection.**²

With a dynamic leader at the helm of an agile team, enrollment teams will serve their college well through COVID-19 and the demographic cliff—and position the school for even greater success in the process.

Maximize the Enrollment Budget

Managing Up to Greater Enrollment Investments

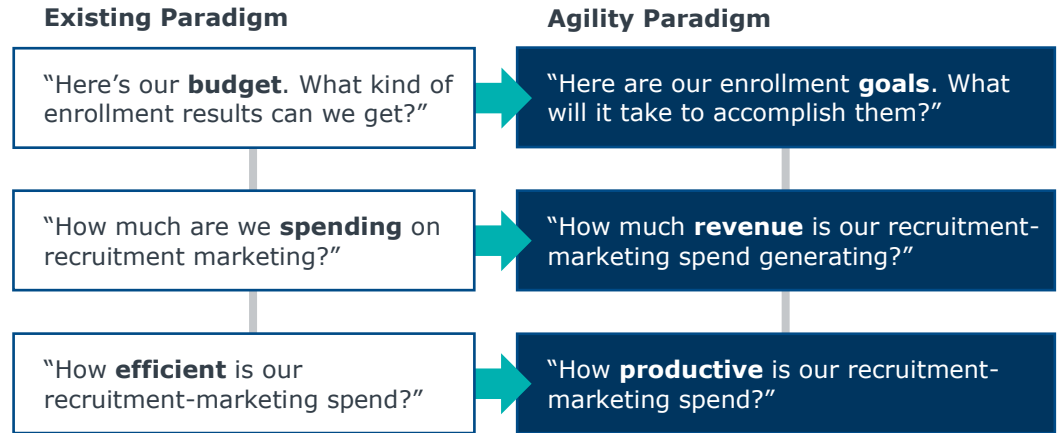
Enrollment and the resources required to succeed are always institutional priorities. However, in this time of COVID-19 when budgets are shrinking and workforce reductions are on the table, many colleges are resorting to “across the board” budget reductions because prioritizing cutbacks is culturally too difficult. This approach is not strategic, nor is it in the best interest of the school.

Enrollment leaders need to collaborate with their Chief Financial Officers to remind colleagues what percentage of the operating budget comes from tuition and auxiliary revenue. The case must be made that cutting back on investment in the revenue engine is at best counterproductive and potentially crippling long-term. Although it may sound tone deaf, schools cannot achieve their mission—much less retain valuable faculty and staff—without enrollment success.

2) <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/04/11/the-changes-covid-19-is-forcing-on-to-business>

For many colleges, achieving enrollment success will require shifting the mindset on campus from enrollment being a cost center to enrollment being an investment incubator with quantifiable returns. EAB has consistently recommended this perspective for some time. However, the need for new investments and tactics to enroll students amid COVID-19-related changes makes it even more important for enrollment teams to cultivate a high-value narrative across campus.

Redefining Enrollment’s Value Proposition



Use of this framework to guide institutional budget conversations results in gains in credibility for the enrollment leader who is arguing for additional support. Next, enrollment leaders should evaluate the metrics needed to reframe their budgetary conversations around the agility paradigm.

Key Questions to Ask When Assessing Enrollment Metrics

Enrollment Goals	Net Tuition Revenue	Recruitment Costs and Gains
What are your enrollment goals as of today?	What is the breakdown of net tuition revenue per enrolled student?	What recruitment activities do you undertake in each market?
How were your enrollment goals determined?	If you meet your enrollment goals, how much revenue will that generate for the campus?	What are the costs associated with those activities?
How might they change across the next two to three cycles?	If you exceed your enrollment goals, how much additional revenue will that generate for the campus? Conversely, if you miss your enrollment goals, how much revenue will that forfeit for your campus?	What does past performance tell you about those markets?

This analysis is about making a case for getting more for and from your recruitment marketing investments—new and old—and ensuring they yield the enrollment results your campus needs to successfully accelerate through COVID-19 and the demographic cliff.

A Nimble Approach to Budgeting Recruitment Activities

With a clear understanding of goals, enrollment leaders may begin working with their teams to assess their recruitment-marketing activities and associated spend. Generally, enrollment team members are nimble and opportunistic—perfect characteristics to generate positive momentum during seasons of constant change. The framework outlined below will help enrollment leaders engage their teams to identify new methods to achieve enrollment goals.

EAB recommends organizing recruitment activities and investments into three categories:

1. Those that are proven effective and are possible during COVID-19.
2. Those that are not feasible in the time of COVID-19, which frees up budget and staff resources that may be reallocated to new investments.
3. New initiatives that are building blocks for progress during COVID-19 and prepare the institution for success during future cycles of declining demographics.

The first category of activities should be identified and quantified when completing the recruitment costs and gains section above. This category reminds the team they need proven strategies with demonstrable results. Many of the activities that have proven effective in past cycles remain largely applicable today, even if they evolve into different modes of delivery.

See how EAB Enrollment Services partners are bringing in record classes in the midst of COVID-19.

[Read the case studies](#)

The second and third categories provide enrollment teams with the opportunities to get creative. Collective brainstorming is one of the best ways to unleash creativity and innovation. Use the exercise below to cultivate a guided brainstorming session.

Team Exercise to Evaluate Productive Recruitment Investments

What activities can we no longer perform?	What was the purpose of the activity?	What other activities can we initiate to achieve this purpose?
Travelling regionally	Enable direct student engagement in core markets	Conduct ongoing personal outreach Provide more opportunities for students to engage on the college website
Hosting on-campus events	Give prospects a preview of daily student life	Host experiential virtual events Feature charismatic faculty in virtual events
Purchasing more names from test providers	Reach more students to make up for fewer anticipated enrollments	Improve email deliverability rate Create capture opportunities through college website Explore search engine marketing

The list shown above is not comprehensive or exclusive. The right strategy might be to find new list sources for name purchase *and* improve email deliverability, or to reallocate your counselors' travel time to hosting virtual regional events *in addition to* conducting personalized outreach.

This simple evaluation is the starting point. The next step is to pull the items listed in the new activities columns to vet their efficacy as new opportunities.

New Activities Includes links to other EAB resources	New Investments Needed What investments will we need to make to do this well?	Future-State Applicability Will this effort benefit the anticipated future state?
Conduct ongoing personal outreach	Do we need a CRM or additional training to use our CRM more effectively? Do we need additional staff training? Do we need predictive analytics to prioritize counselor outreach? Do we need a better platform to host video calls?	Rating: Moderate Assumptions: Travel is likely to resume within the next two cycles. Predictive analytics may allow smarter use of counselor time, which would be even more important when travel resumes.
Provide more opportunities for students to engage on the college website	Does our website provide the information prospective students need? Should our website have a chatbot?	Rating: High Assumptions: As demographics shift, we may need to work differently to reach nontraditional students who are less likely to be able to travel for campus visits.
Host experiential virtual events	Do we have the technology needed to host robust virtual events? Do we need a platform for virtual campus tours? Do we need to learn best practices for virtual event planning/hosting? Do we have charismatic staff, alumni, and/or current students who can participate in our virtual events?	Rating: High Assumptions: As demographics shift, we may need to work differently to reach nontraditional students who are less likely to be able to travel for campus visits. Early and excellent virtual events may positively influence students' perceptions of online learning.
Benchmark email deliverability rate	Should we test our email marketing performance? Should we evaluate the email deliverability rate of our recruitment-marketing partners?	Rating: Moderate Assumptions: As the number of high school students decreases, the importance of engaging those in our inquiry pool increases.
Create capture opportunities through college website	Do we need more interactive content to engage prospective students and gather their information?	Rating: Moderate to High Assumptions: College Board and ACT have gathered the majority of incoming high school juniors and seniors, but without intervention, younger students may become less reachable.
Explore search engine marketing	Should we do (more) paid search?	Rating: Moderate Assumptions: College Board and ACT have gathered the majority of incoming high school juniors and seniors, but without intervention, younger students may become less reachable.

Putting the Pieces Together

In addition to fostering creative ideas, this exercise supports a nimble and resilient enrollment culture. It allows team members to raise their hands to take on new and different tasks.

Ultimately, successfully setting a budget strategy will mean checking the following boxes:

- Quantifying the distinct value of enrollment based on NTR and NTR per enrolled student
- Shifting the mindset on campus about enrollment from a cost center to a revenue generator
- Securing the maximum possible budget support for enrollment
- With input from the enrollment team, identifying new and purposeful investments that serve near-term and longer-term objectives
- Giving team members the opportunity to take on new initiatives

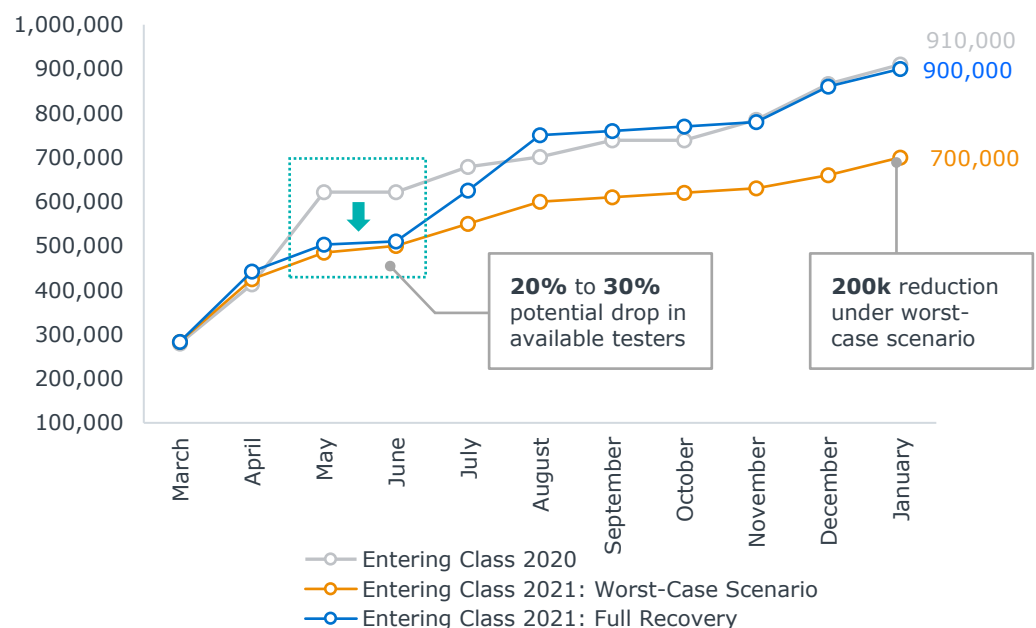
Once these goals have been accomplished, each enrollment team member should be freed up to do his or her best work. Now is the time for the enrollment leader to step back and allow individual team members to be creative, to innovate, and to execute according to the budget strategy.

Embracing New Ways to Find Students

COVID-19's Immediate Impact on Name Availability

No aspect of enrollment will go untouched by the demographic cliff, but enrollment leaders have been especially concerned about their future ability to find prospective students as the number of high school graduates decreases. Because the onset of COVID-19 forced both ACT and College Board to cancel and delay testing dates, enrollment teams are facing this issue of limited student information now. ACT could see as much as a 22% reduction in test takers for Entering Class 2021, and College Board could see upwards of a 30% drop in test takers.

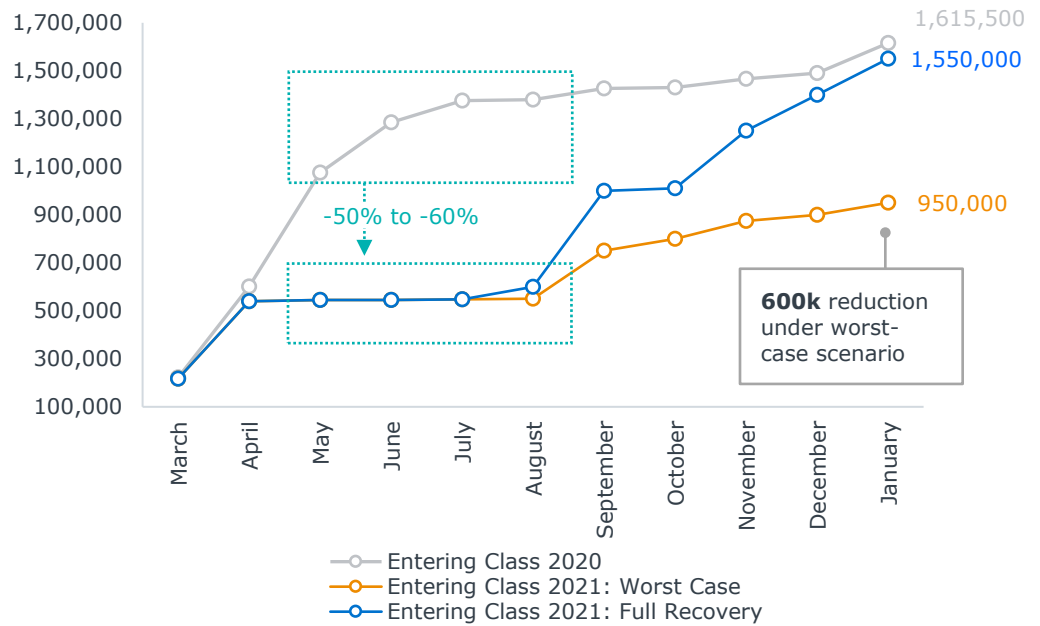
Testing Delays Could Lead to 22% Drop in ACT Records³



3) EAB research and analysis.

- ### Assumptions for the Impact of Delayed ACT Testing
- March testing date was canceled.
 - June and July testing dates were maintained and although they were consistent with past years, they did not recoup any testers from the previously missed date.
 - Ten of 14 states that perform state-level testing completed it before the pandemic struck.
 - ACT has added several fall testing dates to the calendar.

Testing Delays Could Lead to >30% Drop in SAT Records⁴



- ### Assumptions for the Impact of Delayed SAT Testing
- May and June testing dates were cancelled.
 - Eighty-five percent of Entering Class 2021 students have some information available via College Board.
 - PSAT is available for >76% of Entering Class 2021 students, with available information including AP scores and high school GPA.

Respond to Near-Term Name Delays with Multilevel Strategy

COVID-19 may have disrupted the testing schedule, but the outlook is still good for enrollment teams to deploy their outreach close to their originally scheduled plans. The enrollment leader’s role is to understand and prepare for the worst-case scenario by acknowledging the challenges associated with marketing to fewer students and empowering teams to adjust their campaigns to overcome those challenges.

4) EAB research and analysis.

For Entering Class 2021, EAB is guiding partner institutions to categorize their student names into three distinct student populations and adjust their outreach strategy for each population.

Availability of Names in Academic Year 2020-2021



I Available

The number of students available in early fall 2020 may be smaller than the number that will become available later in the academic year, but there is no reason to wait to launch planned marketing campaigns.

Enrollment teams should proceed with their originally planned targeting strategy, deployment timeframe, and communications for students whose names are available through the following sources.

- ACT:
 - February, June, and July testing dates
 - State-level testing
- College Board:
 - March testing date
 - Early assessments
 - SAT registrations
 - Free files for College Board partners
 - Previously purchased nonresponders
- Alternative sources:
 - Cappex: a college search and decision platform that provides colleges with a subscription-based platform to identify and engage with the nearly 1.5 million high school students in their network
 - Christian Connector: a college search and scholarship resource that gathers information on students specifically interested in Christian colleges

Marketing to a smaller number of students will make conversion rates even more important. As demographics continue to shift and the number of college-going students lessens over time, enrollment teams will benefit from understanding how conversion rate improvements will support enrollment goals.



Quantify Conversion Rate Improvements

Enrollment team members can use the following exercise to determine what conversion rate improvements are needed to meet their enrollment goals. This exercise uses inquiry rate based on email campaigns as just a sample conversion rate. EAB recommends creating a list of all conversion rates by funnel stage and conducting this exercise for each one.

Step 1: Review past performance to gather baseline metrics.

How many students opened your emails? _____

Of those students, how many entered your inquiry pool? _____

Your Inquiry Rate (from email campaigns) = _____%

Email Open Rate = (# of students who entered your inquiry pool via email) ÷ (# of students who opened your emails) × 100

Step 2: Determine the appropriate downstream measurable impact. In this example, we will use application submissions.

Of the number of students who entered your inquiry pool, how many eventually submitted an application? _____

Your Application Rate (based on email opens) = _____%

Application Rate = (# of students who submitted an application) ÷ (# of students in your inquiry pool) × 100

Step 3: Create various scenarios to understand the impact of demographic declines and performance improvements.

Using your inquiry rate and application rate above, how many application submissions will you have if the number of students who open your emails decreases by 20%?

Example: If your existing inquiry rate is 25% and your application rate was 2% based on 100,000 students having previously opened your emails, a 20% reduction in students who open your emails would net you 400 applications—compared to 500 before the 20% reduction.

How many application submissions will you have if the number of students who opened your emails decreases by 20% but your inquiry rate increases by 3%?

Example: If your new inquiry rate is 28% and your application rate remained at 2% based on 100,000 students having previously opened your emails, a 20% reduction in students who open your emails would net you 448 applications.

How many application submissions will you have if the number of students who open your emails decreases by 20% but your inquiry rate increases by 3% and your application rate increases by .5%?

Example: If your new inquiry rate is 28% and your new application rate is 2.5% based on 100,000 having previously opened your emails, a 20% reduction in students who open your emails would net you 560 applications.

Many factors contribute to conversion rates. Typically, multiple touchpoints and metrics contribute to downstream impact. For example, EAB’s research and analytics show a strong correlation between the timing of emails and social media ads to boost inquiry generation. The exercise shown above is not intended to capture all of those nuances, but to help enrollment teams discern where to focus efforts to overcome uncontrollable circumstances.

For enrollment teams that currently operate with high conversion rates, practice the conversion rate exercise to determine how adding or removing activities will affect conversion rates. As much as incremental improvements will help, incremental declines will hurt.

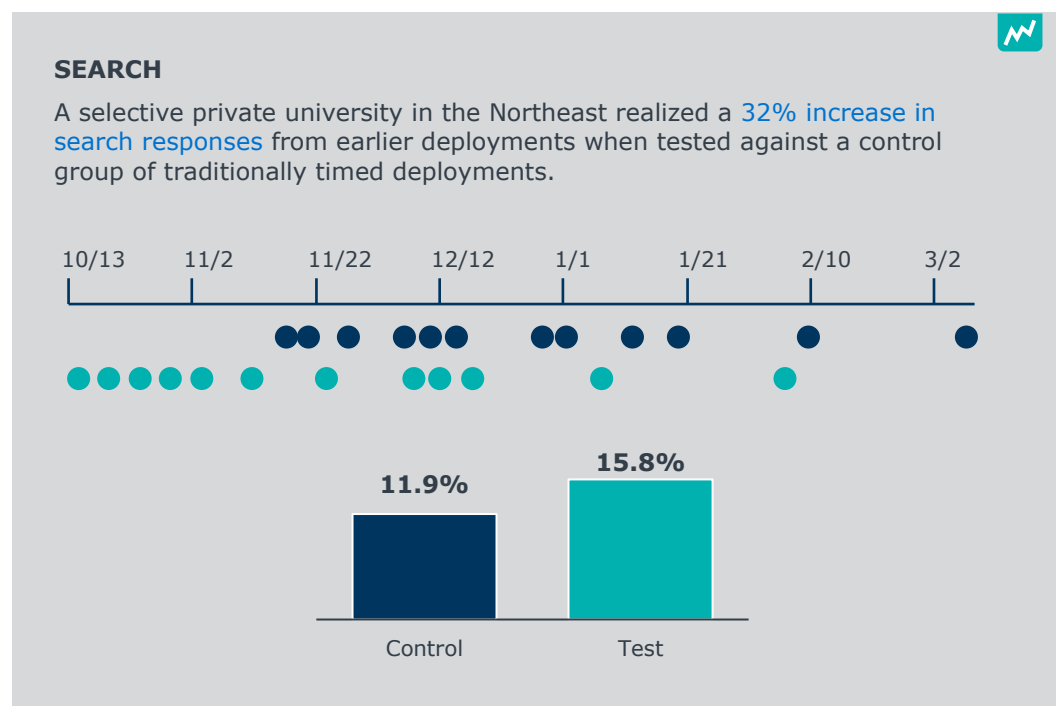
Conversion rate improvements are critical to supporting enrollment goals, but EAB does not recommend using them to narrow the top of the funnel, a development that is occurring organically due to the demographic cliff. Enrollment teams that focus on narrowing the funnel for cost-savings risk may find themselves unable to intervene later in the funnel.

2 Coming Soon

On a positive note, EAB anticipates the number of students available through test providers will rebound in the fall and winter for Entering Class 2021. EAB recommends enrollment teams focus on two aspects of their strategies to make the most of opportunities to reach these students.

- Purchase student information now according to existing qualifiers but base them on PSAT or AP scores rather than SAT or ACT scores, which can be factored in as they become available.
- Plan now to schedule and deploy additional launches as soon as names become available later in the cycle. As names become available across an indeterminate period of time, colleges that are first-to-market will have an advantage.

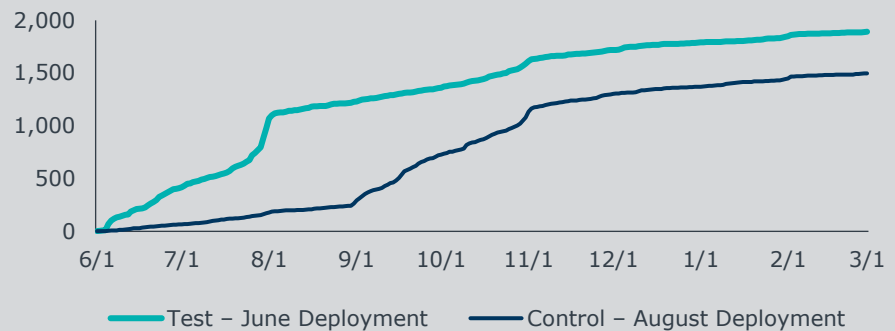
Create First-Mover Advantage





APPLICATION

A selective private university in the Southwest realized a [25% increase in applications](#) and [23% more enrollments](#) from deployments that rolled out two months earlier than those in the control group.



3 Unlisted

The size of the group consisting of unlisted students, or students whose information will never become available through list sources, is currently much smaller than the sizes of the other two groupings. Amid the demographic pressures accelerated by COVID-19, however, this group of unlisted students must not be overlooked.

Consider the earlier exercises in which the value of enrollment was quantified based on metrics such as net tuition revenue per enrolled student. What is the return on the investments needed to enroll unlisted students? EAB recommends enrollment teams partner with their marketing departments to optimize their overall digital presence with three imperatives for prospective students.

1. Getting students to your .EDU
2. Making a good impression with your .EDU
3. Capturing student information through your .EDU



#1: Getting students to your .EDU

College-bound students who are unfindable using traditional methods are likely to use Google to help them in their college search.

Therefore, enrollment teams need to become proficient in search engine marketing (SEM) through a combination of [search engine optimization](#) (SEO) and [paid search](#).



SEO

If and where a college’s name appears in related search results—and how likely students will be to learn about it—is determined by complex and ever-evolving algorithms search engines use to rank websites. SEO applies specific design recommendations based on a detailed understanding of these algorithms, resulting in an improved search ranking.

Fortunately, a search-engine optimized site also enhances a student’s experience on the site, serving as a good starting place for colleges that want to explore opportunities to improve their digital presence.

	Improves search rank	Improves user experience
Good website navigability	✓	✓
Highly relevant website content	✓	✓
Engaging content formats	✓	✓
Fast page-load times	✓	✓
Mobile optimization	✓	✓



Paid Search

Most search traffic will be organic, making SEO a critical tool in any digital strategy. Unlike SEO-enhanced organic search, paid search allows the advertiser to control the brand experience for a given search query by hand-selecting what type of search terms are important.

Colleges can bid on a term to appear at the top of the search results—the highest bidders get the top spots—and direct students to a landing page that gives specific content relevant to that search term. The most effective application of paid search is to use corresponding landing pages to gather student information.

Given the bidding aspect, however, paid search can become costly for schools that lack experience. A successful paid search campaign starts with identifying the desired audience based on geography, demographics, audience types (lookalike audiences, remarketing audiences, uploaded student lists, etc.), device, and specific and broad search terms.

Identification of the campaign’s goals and success metrics must also occur at the beginning of a paid search campaign. Such metrics may include impressions, clicks, cost per click, and click-through rate. Schools that deploy paid search campaigns need to routinely analyze these factors to continuously improve paid search campaigns and get the best return on their investment.



#2: Making a good impression with your .EDU

In EAB's 2019 Student Communication Preferences survey, a college's website took the top spot as the most helpful source in a student's college search—up three spots compared to the 2017 survey. Moreover, 93% of parents surveyed by EAB make a point of visiting websites of schools their child is considering, and 81% said a poorly designed site reduces their confidence in a school.

For prospective students who are unknown to a college, the website is the first opportunity to make a connection.

Website optimization seems like a large undertaking and often gets delayed when resources are constrained and budgets are tight. Enrollment teams, however, can make use of their available resources to implement targeted, staged, and incremental improvements.

EAB recommends enrollment teams begin by [auditing the pages that are of greatest interest](#) to prospective students and their parents.

- Academics (courses of study, disciplines, majors)
- Campus visits/virtual tours
- Cost of attendance
- Financial aid
- Outcomes
- Admission standards and procedures
- Online application
- Student life
- Residences and dining facilities
- Campus amenities
- General description of the institution

Rewriting copy to cater to prospective students, adding interactive media to keep students engaged, and including links to other areas of interest are near-term targeted interventions that enrollment teams can implement in partnership with their marketing departments.

Continuous attention must be given to the website for the foreseeable future, in light of how quickly student interests and concerns are during the pandemic. Creating a system to regularly review website data will help enrollment teams respond to students' and families' needs and provide them with the college search information they will value most.



#3: Capturing student information through your .EDU

The ultimate goal in creating a digital presence for students in the unlisted category is to know who they are and get them into the inquiry pool. This gives enrollment more opportunities to control the search experience and better nurture the relationship with prospective students.

The most common method for successfully acquiring student information is simply to [ask them for it](#). Create compelling landing pages that offer students the opportunity to input their information in return for a content or mailable deliverable. Include newsletter and information sign-up forms. Use chatbots that capture student information while answering prospective students' questions.

A more technically advanced method is to [create pixelated microsites](#) to de-anonymize website visitors. Per [digitalmarketer.com](#), "Marketing pixels, aka tracking pixels, are essentially these tiny snippets of code that allow you to gather information about visitors on a website—how they browse, what type of ads they click on, etc." As an example, EAB's YouVisit virtual tour platform uses pixels to identify students and their level of engagement with EAB partner schools.

Future Availability of Student Info

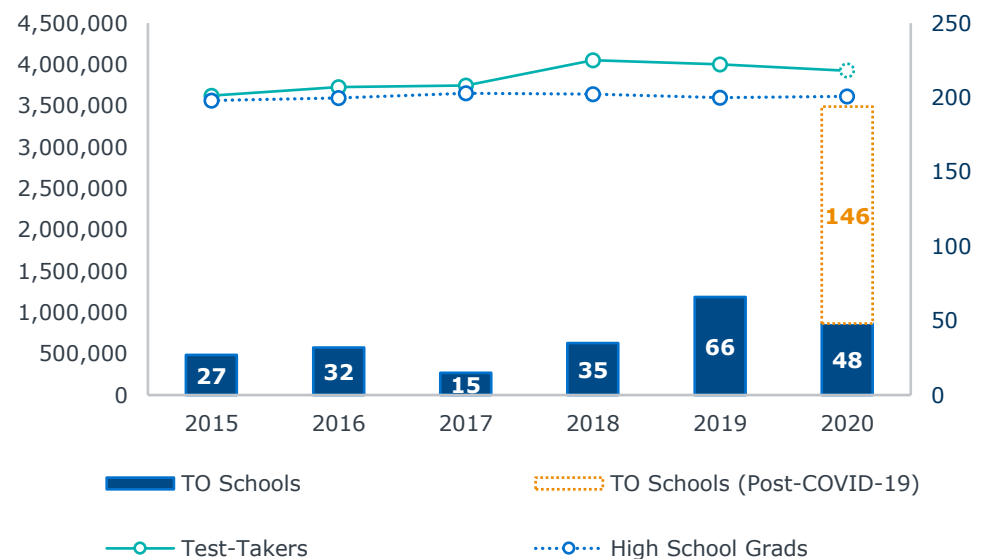
As COVID-19 gives way to greater demographic declines, understanding how the “unlisted” category may change will be critical for enrollment. EAB is monitoring how sophomore and junior high schoolers’ testing behaviors may change as a result of not completing practice tests during COVID-19. EAB is also continuously monitoring how students opt-in to provide their information to testing providers. Early evidence points to students simply passing up the question altogether, not opting in or out of providing their information. Both ACT and College Board are working to provide more training and guidance to encourage students to opt-in.

With the testing delays during COVID-19, test-optional policies are becoming even more popular—at least temporarily. Many colleges have been moving toward test-optional over the last few years, leaving many to wonder if that will change the status quo for testing and availability of names through test providers.

EAB does not anticipate the number of test-takers to decline significantly. State-based testing is slated to become more common, and test scores will continue to be used for scholarships and other purposes. EAB will continue to assess any changes to test-takers with wider adoption of test-optional policies. Currently, there’s no evidence to indicate test-optional policies have an adverse effect on the number of test-takers.

New Test-Optional (TO) Schools vs. Test-Takers

National Total of Students Taking ACT/SAT, Total High School Grads, by Entering Class Year



Putting the Pieces Together

As the pandemic ends and a new demographic landscape emerges, competition among colleges and universities will intensify. Exactly how the increased competition will change the way colleges access student information remains uncertain.

In the midst of the uncertainty, the best way to move forward is incrementally by executing on existing plans for known students, being first to market as new names emerge, and increasing access and overall findability for unknown college searchers.

Anticipate Evolving Student Needs

The Importance of Being Student-Centered

In the new era of higher education, the colleges that will emerge as winners are those that maintain a singular focus: students. Administrators, faculty, and staff will need to understand students better than ever before and to answer a host of questions:

- What do students say they need from an education? How does that line up with what we are delivering to our students?
- What do students want from their college experience?
- What are students concerned about right now? What will their future concerns be?
- How are students changing in terms of background, experiences, family support, and ability and willingness to invest in a college education?

These are not onetime questions either. Thinking about college through the lens of the students should always be top of mind, with quarterly conversations to keep senior leadership focused on evolving student needs.

Much of this is about supporting a student-centered approach where every decision, no matter how great or small, meets this standard: "Students will be served well by this decision."

Serving Prospective Students' Near-Term Needs

The enrollment leader's role in putting students first is twofold. The first priority is to ensure prospective students are well served throughout the entire enrollment process. The second is to give voice to the students of the future, representing them at the highest levels of strategic decision-making.

Both priorities make it necessary for enrollment teams to understand students' and families' current concerns, how they are changing over time, and how to respond.

COVID-19 has raised a host of new concerns for students and their families. For seniors applying to college, these include:

- Will I be able to get into college if my extracurriculars were canceled or if I haven't taken the ACT/SAT or if I don't have grades from Spring 2020?
- What if campuses aren't open for in-person instruction?
- What if they are open? Will my health be at risk on campus?
- How are my friends who graduated last year experiencing their freshman year?
- If I'm forced to take some virtual classes, what are the online learning experiences like?
- Will I like a school I've never seen in person?
- Do I have what I need to apply? How do I get financial aid?



Infographic: COVID-19 and the Enrollment Funnel

EAB's [infographic](#) titled "COVID-19 and the Enrollment Funnel" identifies some of the concerns students and families may have from awareness to decision. It also provides a series of possible near-term activities that can be applied to the recruitment investments team's brainstorming exercise.

Creating an Infrastructure for Prospective Student Communications

If and how these questions shift as the 2020–2021 school year progresses is difficult to predict. No one knows how the public health and political climates will change in 2021. With so much in flux, enrollment teams have lost the ability to describe their living and learning environments with certainty. While it may be difficult to be proactive in every communication, enrollment leaders need to ensure their teams are responsive.

Responsive is not equivalent to reactive. Reactive denotes possible lack of preparation or short-sightedness. Responsive signals a quick and positive reaction. It requires preparation and a nimble infrastructure that anticipates change. Therefore, enrollment teams need a coordinated, well-thought-out, and well-executed communications plan and supporting infrastructure.

Checklist for a Responsive, Coordinated, and Student-Centered Communications Infrastructure

RESPONSIVE

- We have a mechanism in place to monitor changing situations.
- We know how prospective students and families feel about this situation, because
 - We've surveyed them.
 - We monitor their comments and questions online.
 - Our counselors have asked students as part of their outreach.
- Our campus has a COVID-19 response team that is acting decisively.
- Our VP EM participates in COVID-19-related decision-making representing prospective students and parents.

COORDINATED

- We have a cross-functional communications committee that includes one individual from each department who communicates directly to students:

Sample cross-functional committee from [EAB's Integrated Prospect Communication Plan Toolkit](#)

Enrollment Management	Academic Affairs	Student Affairs	Other Offices
Admissions	Academic colleges	Housing	Marketing
Registrar	Academic advising	Orientation	IT
Financial aid	Academic support	Dean of students	Advancement

- Our cross-functional committee makes quick decisions about student messaging.

- Enrollment is directly involved in or fully responsible for crafting communications to prospective students.
- We have mapped out the various channels used for prospective student communications and have an enrollment channel manager who coordinates updates according to the direction of the cross-functional committee.

Channel	Manager	Channel	Manager
Student emails	_____	Website	_____
Parent emails	_____	Facebook	_____
Counselors' direct outreach	_____	Instagram	_____
Virtual platforms	_____	Snapchat	_____
Virtual events	_____	LinkedIn	_____
Alumni-involved events/communications	_____	YouTube	_____
Faculty-involved events/communications	_____	Other (e.g. TikTok)	_____

- We have accountability checks in place.

STUDENT-CENTERED

- Our communications speak directly to the questions and concerns students have expressed.
- Our messaging speaks to where students are in their enrollment journey.
- Our messaging appeals to various student segments: racial/ethnic minority, first-generation, socioeconomic status, and in-state/out-of-state.
- Our copy encourages and empowers students to make the right decisions for themselves.
- We promote deeper student engagement by providing actionable next steps.
- Our messages, including content and tone, are tailored by channel to reflect how students use each channel.

Future-State Student and Family Concerns

COVID-19 will influence students' needs and expectations while it is under way, but it will also shape their behaviors for years to come.

Gen Z students may experience a generation gap similar to Millennials' response to the Great Recession. Older Millennials who were in college or had recently graduated bore the brunt of the financial crisis. Younger Millennials witnessed the impact on older Millennials and became financially risk-averse, making them the most financially conservative generation since the Great Depression.⁵

Older Gen Z students—those who had a traditional campus experience, graduated, and found jobs prior to COVID-19—had already proven to be pragmatic and generally risk-averse.

The characteristics of younger Gen Z students—those who are witnessing the impact of COVID-19 on high school experiences and family finances—will undoubtedly differ from the characteristics of the Gen Zers that came before. All signs point to the likelihood that younger Gen Z students will be even more severely critical of the value of a college degree.

Students' long-term questions and concerns may include:

- What does my tuition cover?
- Is a college education worth the money?
- Will I be able to get a job?
- What kind of jobs will be available?
- Should I base my major on job security?

A Brand to Fit Future Students

Colleges cannot afford to misalign with Gen Z students during the demographic cliff. With the urgency of COVID-19, now is the time for colleges to ensure their brand will resonate with students now and in the future.

First, what does "brand" mean? Brand is how a college communicates its mission and value proposition. The brand encompasses the experience and opportunities a college provides to its students. It must be compelling, meaningful, and congruent with campus culture. As students' expectations and needs change, the brand should communicate a mission and value proposition that serves those needs.

Enrollment may not determine the mission statement or manage branding. However, as the representative of future students, enrollment leaders are responsible for assessing how prospective students perceive the college's brand. They are also responsible for ensuring their teams adapt and express the brand in enrollment communications.

The Enrollment Leader's Brand Assessment Questionnaire

What does our brand convey?



- How do we define our mission and value proposition?
- How do students relate to our mission and value proposition?
- Does our programming reinforce our mission?
- Does our value proposition accurately describe our program offerings, experiences, and results?
- Does our brand reflect our mission and value proposition?

If your answers to the above questions indicate misalignment between your college's mission and value proposition and its brand, work with marketing to identify what aspects of the brand may need updating.

5) <https://www.businessinsider.com/personal-finance/millennial-generation-gap-great-recession-financial-crisis-money-habits-2019-3>



Does your brand resonate with students?

- When did we last evaluate our brand?
- How have students’ needs changed since then?
- Does our brand align with future students’ needs as best we can predict?
- Does our brand resonate with nontraditional students, including students from racial/ethnic minorities, different socioeconomic backgrounds, first-generation homes, and in-state, out-of-state, and rural areas?

If the answers above indicate misalignment between your brand and students, work with marketing to identify what aspects of the brand may need updating.

Create an Enrollment Team Feedback Loop

Frontline workers who speak to students daily are the best source of information on how students perceive the school’s brand. EAB recommends enrollment teams create a feedback loop that enables counselors to solicit brand-related input from prospective students and bring it back to campus to assess with the team.

Sample Branding Questions for Students

- What about our college interests you?
- Does anything in particular catch your eye?
- How would you describe our college based on what you’ve seen so far?
- How does our college seem to measure up to your ideal college experience?

Scoring System for Qualitative Feedback

Question	Answer	Ranking	Student Info
Use the sample questions above or ask your own.	Include important context to help inform ranking.	How closely do their answers align with or indicate a positive disposition toward your brand? Use a scale of 1–5, with 5 being a close alignment and 1 indicating misalignment.	Add student demographic details to understand how the brand resonates with various student segments.

The feedback loop should be ongoing, and input reviewed bi-monthly or quarterly. The enrollment leader can then use prospective students’ input to assess how the brand resonates with them using the questions above.



Does your brand permeate all communications?

- Is your brand consistent across all communication channels?
- Does the enrollment experience you provide to prospective students align with your brand?
- How do your current students, faculty, and alumni speak about your college, and is that consistent with your brand?

If the answers above indicate misalignment between your brand and the channels used to communicate with students, revisit your enrollment message and channel strategies.

Putting the Pieces Together

Ultimately, anticipating evolving student needs is about two things: (1) the processes to constantly evaluate what students say they need (and want) and (2) a vehicle for ongoing communication across campus.

Schools that have these two things in place will fare better with students throughout the pandemic and the demographic cliff.

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