

# The ADMISSIONIST

by LIAISON 

Winter 2021



## THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

# We Are in Good Company Together

Thank you for reading the newest issue of *The Admissionist*, Liaison's quarterly magazine dedicated to the art, science and industry of college admissions. If you have read *The Admissionist* before, welcome back. If this is your first time, welcome to our community.

We launched this magazine in 2018 so you could not only learn more about our products and services, but also gain insights into what we have learned during three decades in the recruitment and admissions space. Little did we know that within a short period of time, our lives — and the world of higher education — would be radically reshaped by forces few of us could have anticipated.

We all hope for a better year ahead. In many ways, I believe lessons we have learned from the unfortunate events of 2020 will help make that possible. First and foremost, being cut off from each other for so long has made us all realize how powerful and important it is to be a member of a community in which everybody works together for the well-being of all members. It has made us appreciate each other more, and underscores the need to be better prepared for whatever may disrupt our lives next.

Liaison builds communities. By its very nature, for example, Liaison's Centralized Application Service (CAS™) creates community by bringing institutions and students together on a global recruiting and application platform that allows students to apply to as many participating programs as they please using just a single set of application materials. In addition, I heard from client after client last year about how effortlessly they were able to maintain business continuity during the pandemic because they had joined the CAS Community.

I am also pleased to inform you that in 2020 we enhanced Liaison's corporate community by acquiring TargetX, a top provider of recruitment and retention software specifically built on the Salesforce platform. This move will simultaneously broaden Liaison's reach and consolidate some of higher ed's most popular tools under one platform. Now we will be able to reach potential applicants earlier and engage students, not only after they enter the classroom, but when they are about to enter the workforce and beyond.

Please reflect on the power of community as you read the following articles. Topics include the changing nature of admissions during the pandemic, the new training we provide and how campus leaders are pivoting to a better future. You will also find information about Liaison's entire range of products and services, including our Enrollment Marketing Platform (EMP™) and SlideRoom™.

I hope you enjoy the magazine and I am very thankful that you are a part of my community.

Best,



*George*

**George Haddad**  
Founder and CEO

**LIAISON**

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The **ADMISSIONIST**  
by **LIAISON**

# HOW SAVVY CAMPUS LEADERS ARE PIVOTING TO A BETTER FUTURE

**TARGET**  by **Sasha Peterson**  
A LIAISON COMPANY CEO

**I**t would be an understatement to say that life changed dramatically on Friday the 13th of March 2020.

**That was the day we sent staff home for what we thought would be a few weeks. Kids came back from school thinking they were getting a long weekend. They didn't yet understand that summer vacation had both already started and already been cancelled. Businesses began closing and wondering how they would survive. And of course, colleges and universities had to scramble to manage students who were still on campus, including international students who couldn't leave easily.**

**Most importantly, schools began struggling with the task of converting academic programs that had traditionally been run on campuses — in some cases for hundreds of years — to virtual forums that were still capable of engaging students.**

#### **Operating in a fog at first**

The Coronavirus forced everybody to pivot, even though they didn't necessarily know they were doing it just yet. We all needed to start making decisions, but in many ways we were operating in a fog. We didn't know what to expect, and we didn't know when it would end. We didn't know what was right and what was wrong, and we kept getting a steady stream of information that was really just based on guesses. But we still had to learn how to teach in this new environment. We still had to learn how to operate a campus with a skeleton crew. We still had to figure out how to maintain our businesses so that our employees could continue to be employed. We were forced, on a fundamental level, to think about how to survive.

COVID-19 quickly became the ultimate plot twist of our lives, and people began to ask themselves, "Can we find opportunity in this crisis?" From my perspective, the answer, in most cases, was yes. The power of the pivot executed at TargetX and at so many of the schools we work with has inspired us all to think about how we can do even more in the months and years ahead.

#### **Campus connections**

Consider, for example, Mid Michigan College, which serves about 4,000 students in Harrison, Michigan. Mid Michigan has always prided itself on the outstanding student support it offers, whether it's academic advising, financial advising

or just overall support on campus. And they always want to raise the bar.

Even before the pandemic, Mid Michigan wanted to be able to offer support services in different modalities rather than just through in-person office visits. But it was difficult to find the time to even start a pilot program. Then COVID forced the issue. When campus closed, the team at Mid Michigan embraced it as an opportunity to look at creating a pilot program. They began trying extensive advising online through Zoom, and they leveraged some of TargetX's technology as well.

They were soon able to offer new programs on campus they hadn't even thought of in the past because the pandemic gave them the opportunity to leverage existing resources in new ways. In my opinion, Mid Michigan clearly offers a great example of how to harness the power of the pivot.

#### **A new paradigm**

Valencia College, which serves more than 40,000 students across seven campuses in Florida, has a different but equally compelling pivot story to share. Valencia had wanted to initiate a true digital transformation across every campus. However it soon became clear that the "offline" processes it had in place for advising, financial aid and even basic enrollment were specifically designed for face-to-face interactions. Imagine their shock when COVID hit and they realized none of their existing processes would work anymore.

Valencia, in turn, opted to work more closely with the TargetX team for effective online student engagement solutions. Together, we viewed the predicament as an opportunity to fundamentally reimagine how to coordinate communications across multiple campuses and created a new paradigm about how to grow and evolve.

Rather than look at the challenges that we continue to face today as obstacles that are going to beat you down, I encourage you to take a cue from Mid Michigan and Valencia and view this moment in time as a huge opportunity to embrace innovation, unleash the power of the pivot and, ultimately, emerge stronger than ever.

The pandemic won't last forever. The changes you make during the pandemic, however, have the potential to pay new dividends for years to come. ■

# THE ACCELERATION OF CHANGE

## The Future of Admissions — During and After the Pandemic

Nearly a year into the pandemic, many of its potential effects on higher education are still not easy to discern. There is no clear answer, for example, to the question of why undergraduate enrollment was down 4.4% this fall, while graduate enrollment was up 2.9%., according to National Student Clearinghouse.

At the same time, other pandemic-related developments make more sense at first glance, such as the 20% increase in applications to master's in public health programs for the current academic year as reported by *The Washington Post*.

Regardless of whether the latest trends confirm or confound your expectations about the state of higher ed today, most experts agree that they underscore the need to deploy new ways of recruiting and enrolling students — now and in the future.

“Despite the pandemic, uncertainty about attendance and curriculum delivery, the economy and the election, I personally remain optimistic about admissions for many reasons,” said George Haddad, CEO and founder of Liaison.

Why does Haddad feel that way?

### Renewed investment in education (particularly in health professions)

“We predicted back at the beginning of the pandemic that the world of higher education will need to pivot to what we call a ‘preparedness era,’ in which we recognize the need to better prepare to overcome an invisible enemy today and other challenges in the future,” Haddad said. “As a result, we can expect to see more investment in health professions — as well as in health administration — to create models for healthcare delivery in times like these. That, in turn, will lead to more opportunity and success for students.”

### A new appreciation for innovation

“The pandemic has served as a catalyst for acceleration not only in the corporate world but in higher education as well,” Haddad said. “This will not change any time soon. It creates space for innovation and fosters the belief that doing something different is possible and will be welcomed. The old taboos that used to prevent this type of new thinking have been shattered.”

### More productive collaborations

According to Haddad, ongoing budget cuts at schools across the country will likely make it even more difficult for admissions offices to operate at peak efficiency — unless they enter into strategic collaborations with trusted partners.

“An admissions professional’s core competency is to nurture students and to highlight the value of the school to attract best-fit applicants,” he explained. “Therefore, entrusting partners such as Liaison to do administrative work on your

behalf — by managing recruitment campaigns, marketing, applications, customer service and transcript and document verification — frees up resources that can instead be devoted to engaging with students.”

### A catalyst for a changed perspective

While the ever-increasing amount of applicant data at your disposal will always be useful, the pandemic has also highlighted the benefits of looking at applicants in different ways, according to Sasha Peterson, CEO of TargetX, a higher-ed enterprise software business recently acquired by Liaison.

“What we’ve found during the last eight months is that clients want to know, ‘How can we engage with students more deeply on personal levels?’,” he said. “I think not being able to see each other in person has opened up our eyes to how important it is to look beyond the data and not just have an algorithm decide whether this student is going to be successful or not. We need to enhance the communication that should be happening between individuals. And because of that, I am actually more optimistic about the future of admissions now than I was a year ago.

“There has been a very slow evolution on most campuses to accept the fact that students today are not the same as they were 10 years ago,” Peterson said. “If you’re looking for a silver lining in a global pandemic, one of them is the acceleration of change. This pandemic, combined with the shift to more hybrid online/offline teaching, is really going to change the next five years in ways that I think would have taken 15 otherwise.”

This article features highlights from *The Future of Admissions — During and After the Pandemic*, a LinkedIn Live session hosted by Jeff Selingo that is now available for on-demand viewing at [Isnedu.com/future-of-admissions](https://www.isnedu.com/future-of-admissions). ■

# THE UNDERGRADUATE-TO-GRADUATE CONNECTION

## How Colleges and Universities are Working to Bridge the Gap Between Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

**W**hen Common App CEO Jenny Rickard, Ph.D., looks at the latest undergraduate enrollment numbers, her thoughts turn to the challenges that today's trends are likely to create for graduate recruitment and enrollment in the years ahead.

**As of November, she said, the number of students filing the Common App was down 8% compared with 2019. Applications from first-generation and fee waiver-eligible students declined by 16%.**

### Retain now, enroll after graduation

In that spirit of collaboration, Dr. Rickard recently spoke with several admissions professionals from programs across the country about building stronger pipelines between their undergraduate and graduate programs in order to boost retention and drive enrollment.

"There's a declining population of traditional-age students in the pipeline. We were already seeing a decline in international enrollment even before the pandemic, and it's only gotten worse," Dr. Rickard said. "Right now, it's really important to look closely at recruiting and retention as we move forward so that we can get undergraduates interested in continuing their education and enrolling in graduate programs."

Of course, many graduate programs are already seeing a spike in interest: Nationwide, graduate enrollment was up 2.9% this fall, according to the National Student Clearinghouse.

### "More meaningful contact"

"We've seen a significant uptick in the number of inquiries that our undergrads are sending out to our graduate programs," said Kelly Lootz, Recruitment & Outreach Manager at University of the Pacific.

"I think there's a huge opportunity for us to capitalize on keeping our undergraduate students around for our graduate programs by using an intentional communication strategy to make sure they take that next step and apply to our program. Students need more engagement, and they are looking for more meaningful contact."

At the City University of New York (CUNY), the "Pipeline Program" fosters

that type of engagement by providing educational and financial support to underrepresented minorities who are interested in pursuing a PhD.

"It's a year-long program that's based at the CUNY Graduate Center and operates in conjunction with the central office at CUNY," said Director of Graduate Recruitment Sonja Prophete. "It prepares students for research and doctoral work, walks them through the graduate admissions process and provides intensive GRE preparation. The peer mentors who guide students through the process are all underrepresented doctoral students who are currently enrolled at the Graduate Center. They can answer any questions students may have and help them both personally and professionally."

At other institutions, including Missouri State University, the COVID-19 pandemic has created unique new opportunities to reach out to undergrads about the benefits of enrolling in grad school.

"Because of COVID, many of our NCAA athletes now have additional semesters or years of eligibility," said Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate College. "So we have really made a concentrated effort to reach out to our athletes to talk about pathways into graduate education. Some of these athletes are very strong students who wanted to do a graduate degree from the beginning. Others came here to compete and get their undergraduate degree. We've identified pathways to graduate education for both types of student, and we're really excited about that."



**The undergraduate-to-graduate connection is critical, particularly when we think about what's happening today. How do we help our society educate more students who can fill the jobs we so desperately need in the workforce? It takes collaboration."**

Jenny Rickard, Ed.D.  
President and CEO



### Application preparation

Dr. Masterson and her colleagues are also thinking about other ways to start engaging with undergraduate students now in order to prepare them for standing out in the grad school applicant pipeline when the time comes.

"One of the things I really appreciate about Liaison's Centralized Application Services, such as GradCAS™, is that students aren't starting with a blank piece of paper," she said. "There are very specific questions to guide the students through the application process. I think we need to do a better job of introducing freshmen and sophomores to these applications so they know what's going to be expected of them in a graduate school application and so they have plenty of time to prepare."

This article features highlights from *The Undergraduate-to-Graduate Connection: Establishing Programs to Boost Retention and Drive Enrollment*, a webinar presented by Liaison and the Common App that is now available for on-demand viewing at [lsnedu.com/undergrad-to-grad](https://lsnedu.com/undergrad-to-grad). ■

# GME 101

## Exploring New and Evolving Best Practices in GME Administration



**BUSINESSCAS** by Stephen Taylor  
Research Director

**T**he adage “you can never go home again” is meant to communicate the sense of nostalgia we develop for the past; there is a natural psychological tendency to see the past — either positively or negatively — in ways that make it impossible to recapture. Regardless of any shared nostalgia for the simpler days of campus life, however, colleges and universities across the country restarted operations this fall and were faced with the difficult task of creating a new normal. In the case of GME, “business continuity” is more than just a catchphrase that’s popular because of the pandemic; it’s a commitment to the creation of an environment and a culture.

**Two leaders in the GME community stand out this year specifically for their success in managing the return to campus — not just in planning and execution, but in their attention to the texture, the details of the return and**

**how they shape a program. Shannon Deer, Ph.D., Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs Programs at the Texas A&M University Mays Business School and Dee Steinle, Executive Director of MBA & MS Programs at the University of Kansas School of Business, agreed to share their experience with the BusinessCAS™ Community in a widely attended webinar, which is now available for on-demand viewing at [lsnedu.com/back-to-b-school](https://lsnedu.com/back-to-b-school), to kick off the semester. Their virtual conversation focused on two key areas that drive the business of business schools: creating a new campus culture and enrollment management.**

### Texas A&M University Mays Business School

For Dr. Deer at the Mays Business School, returning to campus wasn’t just about the *esprit de corps* or navigating multiple buildings for new students, it was about making sure everyone felt safe coming

back during a pandemic. Because the University was taking comprehensive action on the public health front, Dr. Deer had a chance to focus on the foundational feelings of safety.

To do so, Deer and her team worked to create a set of simple tips to create the right environment. Recommendations included unconventional tips like starting group emails with the opener “Dear Mom,” as a way of setting the language and tone (*to be replaced with something more appropriate to the audience prior to sending, of course*).

Also included were suggestions to “focus on empathy” when working with stressed students and staff, “don’t ask why” in an aggressive or challenging sense, to “over-listen” in small group communication to make sure people feel heard and to focus on the future in both mindset and operations. These recommendations come together to create a framework in which staff and students feel holistically cared for and start to relax enough to allow true learning experiences to take place.

### University of Kansas School of Business

At the KU School of Business, Steinle looked at a different but equally challenging issue: enrollment management during a crisis. The School has a strong reputation for a culture of teamwork, small classes and open access to faculty, but the many challenges of the pandemic disrupted traditional student recruitment in a way that makes standard operations impossible.

Steinle runs an MBA program with an enrollment management philosophy focused heavily on institutional fit instead of growth, and while the program has a max capacity of about 45 students, the program traditionally has enrolled between 25 and 35 in order to make sure the candidates with the best alignment of experience, goals and program offerings are admitted. Steinle oriented her enrollment management practice to include partners who help generate leads and applications. One such partnership with BusinessCAS allowed Steinle to maintain business continuity and generate awareness with new populations. Steinle’s program growth came from looking to enroll students with the right “fit” to the program, and while the enrollment is currently at max capacity, the real success story here is in using partnerships to find new pipelines and pathways into the program.

### Following up

The conversation with Dr. Deer and Steinle was so well-received, and there were so many questions, that both presenters agreed to respond to some frequently asked questions after the webinar concluded to ensure full visibility into the “how we get through this” planning and execution process.

**Both of you cite working with partners to support your success — have faculty been one of those partners, and if so, how? Should they be involved in these types of initiatives?**

**Shannon Deer (SD), Texas A&M University:** Yes, faculty have certainly been partners for our success. Regarding returning to campus, faculty have been supporting one another as we all adjust to teaching courses via dual delivery (or fully online). Our faculty have been holding teaching development sessions to share best practices. Faculty have also been instrumental in ensuring we have delivered high quality education to our students. Further, presenting a cohesive strategy with staff and faculty has been important in doing the best we can to meet and manage students’ expectations.

Regarding recruitment, we do involve faculty in very strategic ways to support our enrollment efforts. We may connect faculty to a prospective student if the prospective student has a specific interest aligned with the faculty member’s expertise. We also invite faculty to recruiting events. Students are interested in our faculty and what they do inside and outside of the classroom, so we involve them whenever possible.

**Dee Steinle (DS), the University of Kansas:** As Plato once theorized, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” When our international enrollments retracted in 2016, we knew we had to make some big changes. In order to stay viable, it was time to reimagine recruiting and our population in general. We desired a small cohort of full-time MBA students with outstanding admission credentials and high potential for career success. While we had relied on traditional recruiting avenues such as paid/unpaid media, international recruiting tours and marketing to qualified leads through GMAC and GRE, we had not looked at the qualified candidates in our own backyard. When we stopped to think about the smart students who were already at KU, we realized we needed to look at partnerships.

Although we had a long-standing relationship with our School of Law, we had not formed partnerships with other professional programs that attracted top talent. We started with our School of Medicine and, thanks to the leadership of our Dean, we gained an MD/MBA program.



**If there is one strategy I would recommend for maintaining business continuity, it’s joining BusinessCAS. The relationships I have formed with other folks using BusinessCAS have been invaluable.”**

**Dee Steinle**  
Executive Director of  
MBA & MS Programs  
**KU** THE UNIVERSITY OF  
KANSAS  
School of Business



Other health-related programs jumped at the chance to partner with us soon after. We also worked closely with our Schools of Engineering and Architecture to “bridge” students from their undergraduate programs to our MBA.

In addition to partnering with other Schools and campuses, we also formed a partnership with our Undergraduate Admission Office to identify and recruit talented students into the KU pipeline early on in the process. More work can and will be done with top talent undergraduates, but the key has been to “shop local.” We have great students who are already “sold” on KU and have proven to be successful in the classroom. We simply made it our job to inform them of the value of management education.

Our School of Business is small by comparison to other AACSB-accredited and publicly ranked schools. Faculty and administration must work together at every level to make it all come together. I work closely with the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs to ensure that program goals and faculty goals are aligned. In a small school, administration and faculty responsibilities blur. Partnership with faculty is essential.

**Dee, how do you make this enrollment success repeatable for KU? What are the things you know you will need to keep doing to maintain this level of excellence?**

**DS:** I think the key to maintaining enrollment success is to never get comfortable. Always think about your next partnership or next recruiting tactic. The world of GME has changed so much in the last several years. You can no longer count one type of student population to always show up for admission. Joining BusinessCAS has shifted the game for KU. We simply couldn't afford to do the type of marketing that would move the needle on our own.

As a member of the BusinessCAS Community, we engage in a form of cooperative marketing by using the Centralized Application Service. It has served us well and delivered results, as I mentioned in our webinar.

**Dr. Deer, how are you seeing expectations shift with regard to being on campus? For staff? For faculty? For students? How have you communicated with stakeholders about those expectations?**

**SD:** Expectations have had to shift for everyone. Fortunately, for the most part, all parties have been understanding. We have found it easier to manage expectations this fall, because incoming students knew the format would be modified, unlike the continuing students who experienced an abrupt disruption in the spring.

Furthermore, we have been able to bring in all students who wanted to be in person. That has made it much easier to better meet expectations, even though in-person instruction is not exactly the same as it used to be. All students also have the option to join the courses remotely. Of course, like all schools, we have had our fair share of managing expectations from all parties. Here are a few ways we worked to accomplish this:

- **Communicate.** The primary way we have managed expectations and maintained business continuity is through communication. We have made sure the communication goes both ways from the faculty/staff to students and from students to faculty/staff. Here are some examples of enhanced communication:
  - We have done several student surveys to determine their delivery preferences (in-person, remote), how courses are progressing, etc. Students are missing the informal

options for communication (e.g., stopping us in the hallway), so it is important to provide more formal opportunities to provide feedback. We have also reached out on an individual basis when a student's expectations don't seem realistic (e.g., a student who says all events must be 100% in person this fall or they want their money back).

- One program director held one-on-one meetings with every student in his program. He was able to address the students' concerns individually. It was difficult physically and emotionally for him, but it was an investment the director felt was important to make.
- We have also tried to continually communicate choices to the students. We have worked to be much more flexible as we are asking them to do the same.
- **Adjust quickly.** We have tried to respond quickly to faculty needs. This means technology needs, but also needs related to teaching locations. For example, all of our MBA classes have an in-person option. If a faculty member was not comfortable teaching in person, we had to quickly find another faculty member to take their course for the semester or develop an alternative teaching accommodation. Things are changing quickly, so the rapid changes have required quite a bit of juggling.
- **Be understanding.** We can't meet all expectations we normally set for ourselves or others right now. It is important for us to be understanding during this very challenging time.

**What's one thing that absolutely must be rethought now that we're in this era? Enrollment expectations? Relationships and student development?**

**DS:** The most surprising thing the current environment has required us to rethink is what content is most important and what is the best way to deliver that content.

Before 2020, we assumed in-person and synchronous was the best delivery method. For us, 100% online is not the answer either, but the pandemic has required us to, first, be very particular about what is delivered. Then, if it needs to be delivered, what method is best — fully online (asynchronous, synchronous), remote synchronous, dual delivery or in person.

**DS:** I concur with Shannon. We have definitely learned a lot about course delivery and how we can do things differently and more effectively. As a school, we took some time this summer to learn about online course delivery from our faculty who teach in our Online MBA program. The tips and tricks shared among our faculty have been very useful this fall as we adjust to different modalities. Although we still see a lot of value in face-to-face instruction, especially in our full-time program, it is great to have options for continuous learning. On the plus side, we may never be slowed by a snow day again!

**Maintaining business continuity in the years to come**

On a broader level, we must now rethink how we prepare our students for work in a post-COVID-19 world. This time of unrest has certainly shown us where the weak spots are in the private and

public sectors. As future managers, our students must be much more adept at risk analysis and contingency planning. They will need to be project managers extraordinaire. Exposing them to case studies and real-life management issues is so important. There has never been a time that calls for experiential learning more than now. The virtuous circle is that this type of real-time instruction creates value for our students and value for our programs. If we get this right, we create value for our GME industry. Out of crisis, we can create opportunity.

It's clear that business continuity will remain an ongoing issue for leaders in GME as traditional models are disrupted, and innovation will be at the forefront for those who find success in the current moment. Partnerships — considered holistically across the entire value chain of activities related to students — can be a key driver to support growth during a crisis, as we have seen. ■



# Building the Liaison Academy Community



by Jennifer Raab  
Learning Experience Designer

When more than 70% of Liaison Academy survey respondents told us they want best practices taught by actual admissions and enrollment management professionals, we listened.

As a result, Liaison Academy has been working hard during the past year to create the training content you've said you want. So in addition to offering our standard and premium training, we've also organized six new training webinars (and counting) featuring real WebAdMIT users sharing best practices. Their case studies cover everything from scoring applicants to holistic review processes to implementing a new CAS on campus. Most recently, for example, Kristin McAuliffe from Boston University discussed how she uses Lists and Custom Fields. Tre Grue from Temple University talked about how he uses Local Statuses, and Kristin Chalberg from St. Catherine University explained Local vs. Prerequisite GPAs.

We know these webinars are helpful from the feedback we receive:

*"I had been thinking about how to use custom fields better. Definitely cemented my idea that was going around in my head!"* – PTCAS and OTCAS user

*"Thank you so much. It is very helpful and we'll be reviewing the presentation again multiple times as we prepare for the next cycle."* – SOPHAS, HAMPCAS, and UniCAS user

*"Incredibly grateful. I wasn't maximizing my use of the software, and this has helped me to make better use of my time as well as use WebAdMIT better. Thank you!"* – PTCAS user

Your voice matters. *You* can make a difference when it comes to the Liaison Academy training events we produce. That's the power of the Liaison Academy Community.

Is there a topic you want to learn more about that we aren't covering? **Tell us at [lsnedu.com/training-webinar](https://lsnedu.com/training-webinar).** Would you like to present a webinar with our team of WebAdMIT experts? **Email us at [training@liaisonedu.com](mailto:training@liaisonedu.com).**

We look forward to hearing from you.

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## THE MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE ART OF GME ADMISSIONS

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# DISCOVERING THE POWER OF THE PIVOT

Admissions Leaders Share Their Strategies for Tackling  
Higher Education's New Challenges and Opportunities

**S**cott Jaschik, Editor and Co-founder of *Inside Higher Ed*, sounds like a master of understatement when he refers to 2020 as a “tricky year.” However, there’s nothing subtle about the facts and figures he cites when explaining why that’s been the case.

## New realities

Jaschik points to the decision by the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) to change its recruiting rules as one sign that 2020 has been a year of defied expectations and unclear outlooks.

“Nearly 23% of the colleges we surveyed said they’re taking advantage of the NACAC rule changes by offering new incentives. That’s striking, because at the NACAC meeting where these changes were announced, very few colleges said they were going to take advantage of them. But many did. I suspect if we asked the question today, the number would be higher than 23%.”

Even long-time traditions such as requiring applicants to submit standardized test scores may be falling by the wayside: 52% of colleges have changed their policies regarding standardized test requirements in the past year, and more than two-thirds of those that did so because of the pandemic said they expect the new policies to be permanent.

## Expert insights

To get a better idea of the strategies different types of schools are using to address 2020’s challenges and opportunities, Jaschik recently hosted a forum with several admissions leaders, including **Jamie Hansard (Vice President of Enrollment at Texas Tech University)**, **Evan Pauken (Director of Retention and Completion at Kalamazoo Valley Community College)**, **Adam Stoltz (Director of Enrollment Marketing at the University of Idaho)** and **Nate Tucker (Director of IT Systems at Lee University)**.

The following is an edited version of their discussion.

### What are you doing in terms of virtual recruiting campaigns to keep potential applicants engaged?

**Nate Tucker (NT), Lee University:** We’re shifting into some of the digital marketing and drip campaigns that we’ve been talking about for years. Now that we’re forced to get it done, we’re kicking that off. One of the things we’re doing is putting students on a cycle that is unique to them. We’re not just sending out university-wide information, we’re sending information that’s specific to them. That may be a video, or an email or a text message. Everything so far has been very positive. I think the key to all this is not just doing a marketing campaign, but pulling potential applicants in and letting them know we value them and want them here. That personal touch has been huge so far.

### Evan Pauken (EP), Kalamazoo Valley Community College:

Personalization is key. We’re doing more to tell students exactly what they need to do rather than just blanket messaging students. We’re trying to become more targeted and more proactive by tailoring messages specifically to students. We’ve also been talking for a long time about having a student-facing portal where they could see their next steps; we’ve been able to develop that as well. Students who have applied can log in and see what they need to do to get enrolled.

### Adam Stoltz (AS),

**University of Idaho:** We responded quickly. In less than a week, for example, we recorded, edited and published 17 videos focusing on different areas around campus. We integrated our CRM, creating opportunities for students to schedule a time to speak with an admissions counselor or one of our students. And because of restrictions limiting the number of people who can participate in campus visits to just 10, we created a QR code and put it on posters around campus. Students can scan the code whenever they happen to visit and then take a personalized, self-guided tour.

**Jamie Hansard (JH), Texas Tech University:** We’ve really ramped up what we’re doing in the digital space. We’re also working with a company that helps each of our admissions counselors send personalized videos. What we’ve learned through this is that you have to meet the student where the student is. We’re doing a lot of phone calls in addition to videos, and we offer about 15 to 20 virtual events every week. They’re each about 45 minutes long and topic-specific. One might be a meeting with a dean. One might be a campus visit. We’ve also reallocated funds that were earmarked for travel to send out more swag and more print pieces and to purchase more products that allow us to be much more personalized in the digital space.

“Undergraduate enrollment was down 4% this fall. Freshmen numbers are down by 15%. Community college enrollment is down 9%. In all my years covering higher education, I can’t recall similar numbers.”

Scott Jaschik  
Editor and Co-founder  
Inside Higher Ed

## Discovering the Power of the Pivot

Admissions leaders share their strategies for tackling higher ed's new challenges and opportunities

### How does the prospect of finally having a vaccine affect what you're doing now as you prepare for spring?

**EP:** There have been so many changes that it's difficult to "future-cast" at this point. But we really hope that a lot of the practices that we've changed to be virtual will continue that way. We've moved quite a few processes that were done with paper and pencil to online form collection and processing, and we've developed new workflows utilizing those tools.

**AS:** We're trying to drive numbers for the spring more than we ever have in the past. But at the same time, we've been so proactive in our COVID response that we're really trying to push our fall goal. COVID has forced us, in a good way, to work more collaboratively. We've been able to reach out more and work more with the colleges and other departments on campus within our CRM. COVID made things happen faster because we didn't have a choice. But collaboration has been the key to our success.

### What do you expect to happen in the future regarding standardized tests?

**NT:** Our current admissions policy requires them. We use TargetX to move that test data into our Salesforce platform, then we use that to market to students. We load those scores three times a week so we have the most accurate, real-time data.

**AS:** If first-year students entering in 2021 can't take the tests because of COVID then we automatically consider them for admission. If your GPA is below a certain level, an admissions committee will consider your application. I think it will stay this way, but for how long I can't say. We have a special admissions committee with shared governance through the entire university having discussions about that now. There are pros and cons to different scenarios, but with COVID that's our policy for now.

**EP:** The closure of our testing center, and students' lack of access to test-taking technology, really forced a lot of changes. We wanted to give students the opportunity to take courses without needing to take a lot of tests in order to enroll. So we've done quite a bit with that, and so far, those changes have been really positive.

### How are you keeping your staff motivated and excited during this long pandemic?

**NT:** It's important to have some fun when you can. One of our plans is to have a Christmas party, as a team, on Zoom. I'm planning to have gifts mailed to everyone. Then we'll meet and open the gifts together. When we stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking about others — our needs are going to be met. That's the approach I'm taking, and my team is starting to do those types of things as well.

**AS:** I try to lead by example to make sure people feel okay about taking time for themselves. You can't take care of other people if you're not taking care of yourself. For a while a lot of us felt pressured to work all the time, even before COVID. Then with COVID, the question became, "Can you do even more?" And some of us did. But at the same time, you can't pour from an empty cup. So take a half day to go biking or kayaking or whatever. I think people appreciate that.

**EP:** Just trying to be as flexible as possible at this point in time is the approach we've taken. From the very beginning, our President said he wanted to hold every employee harmless from COVID, and that their jobs were secure. Sometimes that involved shifting responsibilities, especially in the beginning. But it was obviously a morale booster to hear that you wouldn't be losing your job.

### What's one thing you'd like to do after the pandemic?

**AS:** We don't take enough time to celebrate the wins and successes that we've had. We're trying to do that more and more here. A lot of us have been away from each other since March. I look forward to getting to see each other again and celebrating the fact that we made it, knock on wood.

**NT:** I hope we find a way to continue embracing technology. We need to, because it extends our reach and has been a great asset for us during this time.

**EP:** We're right in the midst of in-depth discussions about equity gaps and attainment gaps, and how COVID has exacerbated them. I'm really hopeful that this conversation continues and that we really start to address some of these issues. ■

**"COVID made things happen faster because we didn't have a choice. But collaboration has been the key to our success."**

**Evan Pauken**  
Director of Retention  
and Completion  
Kalamazoo  
Valley Community  
College

# THE MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE ART, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY OF GRADUATE ENGINEERING ADMISSIONS

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# DO MORE WITH MORE

CAS Gives You More Time and Resources to Focus on Enrollment Results

Liaison's Centralized Application Service (CAS) combines highly customizable admissions management technology with processing services to streamline the submission and management of applications.

## CAS application processing services include:



### Test Score and Foreign Credential Evaluation

Liaison expedites official test results and foreign credentials delivery through our partnerships with global testing providers and transcript authorities, streamlining integration with your application data.



### Applicant Support

Liaison resolves over one million applicant calls, chats and emails annually, serving as an extension of thousands of admissions offices. Our U.S.-based call center employs highly trained staff to help students move through application completion. During peak periods, our call center offers uninterrupted, around-the-clock support.



### Document Authentication and Storage

Liaison processes over two million documents annually, helping institutions go paperless. We physically receive and scan transcripts as well as manage letter-of-recommendation requests and submissions. During peak periods of the admissions application cycle, we perform these tasks on a 24/7 basis.



Our previous process took literally weeks on end, with people working 80 hours a week to prepare applications for review. With CAS, we didn't have to spend that time processing applications to get everything where it needed to be or sending requests for letters of recommendation out — **all those things were handled by the software itself or by Liaison's services team.**

MATT CIPRIANO

Former Associate Director of Enrollment and Education Operations



Weill Cornell Medicine  
Graduate School of Medical Sciences

## CAS application processing services help you:



### Increase Productivity

Reduce administrative effort with no impact on budget by using our team as an extension of your admissions office. Focus your staff on recruiting, admitting and nurturing best-fit students by outsourcing manual administrative tasks.



### Cultivate Early Matriculant Loyalty

Differentiate your institution with a streamlined application and substantially less time to decision.



### Gain a Competitive Advantage

Empower your team to deliver the earliest offers now, when competition for filling seats has never been more fierce.



### Protect the Integrity of Your Application Assets

Digitize, organize, centralize and secure your documents and save money and space while going paperless.

With a CAS, Oregon Health & Science University **decreased time processing applications by 99%**; most of its programs decreased application review and time to decision by at least one week.



Remarkable! This year, as the number of applications doubled, processing them took less time than manually processing half as many the year before."

JONATHAN PARKER

Assistant Director of Pharmacy Admission



Visit [liaisonedu.com](https://liaisonedu.com) for more admissions success stories, brought to you by Liaison.



# An Interview With Innovation & Technology Hub and SlideRoom Partner The Ion

## “An Expansive Set of Solutions for Applicants and Programs”

**SLIDEROOM** by John Tierney  
by LIAISON Director of Partnerships

The outlook for the new decade — and even during this relentless pandemic — is decidedly bright for SlideRoom partner The Ion. The Ion is an innovation and technology hub located in Midtown Houston, which is accelerating innovation and connecting communities. “In the Houston-Galveston area, there aren’t any other organizations like this,” said Courtney Cogdill, The Ion’s vivacious Program Manager, who works with startups, city leaders and industry partners affiliated with The Ion Smart and Resilient Cities Accelerator (ISRCA).

Stewarded by Rice Management Company, The Ion has an impressive partner list, including Microsoft, Intel, Chevron Technology Ventures, DivInc and the City of Houston.

“We have a lot of really great people that are very invested in what we’re doing,” said Cogdill.

### New goals for next cohorts

The ISRCA has already built two successful cohorts — one executed in-person and one executed virtually. With Cohort 2 drawing in over 450 unique viewers in over 12 countries, Cogdill and her colleagues realized they needed to rethink their application processing system as they sought to scale and streamline applications for Cohort 3. While the team’s prior application process, Google Forms, served The ISRCA team’s needs, Cogdill quickly realized that it was not equipped to manage tracking desired metrics and to enable asynchronous collaboration on a larger scale, at a glance and with ease. “A big part of the application process is the user experience, and I began to wonder if we were truly offering a seamless and enjoyable experience for applicants, mentors and reviewers,” said Cogdill.

Prior to operating virtually, The ISRCA’s selection committee had met in-person to determine finalists. However, with COVID-19 challenges, meeting in-person would not be possible. Cogdill saw this as an opportunity to introduce a new tool. She was familiar with a tried-and-true application-processing tool from her experience working with a healthcare accelerator. “I had come to know SlideRoom a few years ago, working for a different accelerator that used the platform, and our mentors and everyone raved about it. It’s collaborative. Everyone can log in at their ease. They can rank applicants. It can be done so asynchronously, which is fantastic. And it’s so important for today when I think we’re all kind of ‘Zoomed out.’”

Cogdill and her colleagues wanted a cohort application platform that could track applicants geographically and to gain insights on when and why certain candidates weren’t completing their applications. They also needed their mentors to easily access the applications, as well as the ability to create an internal ranking system of candidates.

“SlideRoom took the three different programs and processes we were using and rolled them all into one, which was a time savings for me of at least six to eight hours per week during application season. I didn’t have to go from my Google Forms to my e-mail to do all this. I can get into SlideRoom and do it all. It solves more than just one problem for me,” Cogdill said.

### Clients continue to inspire during COVID-19

The ISRCA has begun accepting SlideRoom applications for its third cohort, to be held in March 2021. Due to its decision to operate virtually, The ISRCA is seeing a lot

## An Interview With Innovation & Technology Hub and SlideRoom Partner The Ion

"An Expansive Set of Solutions for Applicants and Programs"

of applications from outside of Houston, given that the three-month "residency" can now be done anywhere.

As for how The ISRCA's startups have endured COVID-related challenges, Cogdill said it has been overwhelmingly positive. "I think entrepreneurs are some of the most versatile beings on the planet, and I applaud them for their ingenuity and their flexibility," Cogdill said.

She gave an example of re:3D, one of The ISRCA's Cohort 2's startups that created an award-winning COVID program called "PPE for the People." This effort seeks to provide 3D printed personal protective equipment (PPE) to essential workers from underserved populations in the Houston area as they continue to carry out food, transportation, social and municipal services for their community. Fiscally sponsored by Impact Hub Houston, the campaign will provide 3D-printed face shields, ear savers and other PPE to help protect restaurant and fast-food workers, bus and delivery drivers as well as small businesses that seek to reopen safely.

### Reskilling and matchmaking fuels the mission

As part of its mission in serving startups and entrepreneurs, The Ion makes a point of working with all types of businesses. "One of the common phrases we use in our accelerator is that everyone's running their own race," Cogdill said. "Our process is very thorough in that we look to address each startup where they are."

That means, among other things, that The Ion works to support companies in all stages. Some participants are already working with paying clients, and after successfully completing The ISRCA's cohort, they may then begin to offer another service. This ability to "reskill" has come to the forefront for The Ion this year, driven by the global need to ensure that businesses survive. The partnerships that The Ion forges are actually enabling their stakeholders to thrive – even in a down economy.

An important part of what The Ion does is business matchmaking, according to Cogdill. "There are all these

accelerators working on different things, but it's a hub for the community and for those founders to come and say, 'We need help.' Then we say, 'Great, we're going to match you to the help you need, even if it's not from our accelerator.' We will know someone and help you with it, so it's a service to the community."

As part of The Ion's commitment to serving its community, it has been awarded two grants to establish an Accelerator Hub and an Aerospace Innovation Hub. The Accelerator Hub will unite The ISRCA, The Rice Alliance CleanTech Accelerator and DivInc Accelerator, enabling the three accelerator programs to operate out of one hub. The Aerospace Innovation Hub will leverage NASA Johnson's Space Center (NASA JSC) and DivInc to support and develop regional minority business enterprises (MBEs). The Aerospace Innovation Hub will offer networking and outreach events — such as Pivoting Your Business From Earth to Space, education and training and an accelerator program.

### Tools make goals and growth possible anytime

"SlideRoom is the answer to achieving so many of the goals and the data points that we need. And the grants really require us to report needed data and metrics of success. With SlideRoom, I can just log into the dashboard, and there it is."

Armed with these insights, Cogdill can now be proactive in driving application completion and applicant experience. She easily identifies incomplete applications and reaches out to those candidates to offer direct support, which is proving far more effective than the previous approach of sending an email into the ether. At a high level, SlideRoom helps The Ion achieve its organizational goals by providing the analytics that enable streamlined deliverables tracking. This makes it a powerful tool, which ultimately drives success for The Ion's programs. Cogdill is excited about this success and what's to come when the city reopens and The Ion opens its new doors.

"I feel like we're ready for anything," Cogdill said with a smile. ■



# Let your applicants express themselves with

# SLIDEROOM™

by LIAISON

A new study by Adobe for Education\* reveals that students' essential creative skills are not getting the attention they deserve in the college application process.

What's more, the study finds that students *want* opportunities to share more of themselves in their college applications...but that they are usually stymied by the limits of the standard application format.

At a time when filling seats is more challenging and competitive than ever before, it's worth considering what is possible when we empower students to express their essential creative skills with the enhanced application that they want.

## Differentiate your institution.

## Become the first choice of more students.

### With SlideRoom.

- ✓ Arts Portfolios
- ✓ Learning Artifacts
- ✓ STEM Maker Portfolios
- ✓ Business Case Studies
- ✓ Performance Assessments
- ✓ Recorded Auditions
- ✓ Video Presentations
- ✓ Other Novel Uses and Opportunities

SlideRoom supports students and institutions of all educational levels and provides integrations with

CENTRALIZED APPLICATION SERVICE  
**CAS**  
by LIAISON

common app



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\*Adobe for Education (2020) *The Deciding Factor: The Case for a More Holistic Measure of Student Success*. Adobe. [Isnedu.com/adobe-report](https://www.adobe.com/education/insights/the-deciding-factor)

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Daniel J Moran  
Associate Professor of Psychology **LIU Post**

Discover the easiest way to track, verify and manage experiences at [time2track.com](https://time2track.com)

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# SUCCESS WITHOUT DISRUPTION

## How Liaison Helped Our Partners Overcome the Pandemic's Game-Changing Challenges

**LIAISON**  by Deb Erdner  
Vice President, CAS Operations

At Liaison, everything we do is focused on one goal: helping our partners achieve their most important class-building priorities cycle after cycle and year after year. It's always been that way, of course, but this year the pandemic inspired us to accelerate our pace of innovation even more. We recognized our partners' new needs, and we took advantage of new opportunities to help you address challenges nobody could have envisioned just a year ago.

First and foremost, our operations — and by extension, our partner schools' and associations' processes — have experienced zero disruptions since the pandemic reshaped the world of college admissions.

Thanks to a group of dedicated people who have kept everything going at our headquarters in Watertown since the earliest days of the pandemic, we've been able to continue serving each of our clients by processing paper transcripts without interruption.

In order to help our partners keep their admissions goals in sight this year, we also proactively reached out to about 2,500 registrars to promote electronic transcripts. We've never done that before at Liaison. In the past, the associations we work with traditionally took the lead. This year, in order to enhance the application process for schools and students alike, we created an e-mail option for registrars to upload official transcripts. After we did that, we hit an all-time record in June, when we received 5,000 electronic transcripts in a single day on behalf of our partner schools.

We also gave applicants the opportunity to upload unofficial transcripts, which we then verify. None of this would be possible with Liaison's incredible — and essential — team members.



### Great new trends

April, May and June are typically relatively slow months at Liaison. But this year, May was our busiest month by far. The number of documents that we processed for our clients through April alone was approximately half a million. As a result, we're on track to far surpass any of the numbers that we've seen in previous years.

Our verification numbers have increased as well. In July, for example, we went from 20,000 verifications to about 26,000. Since then, we've verified at least 10,000 more each month.

In addition, inquiry contacts for our partner schools approached the one million mark at the end of November, up from 930,000 at the end of March. That was a 40% year-over-year increase.

Even through the darkest days of 2020, Liaison managed to do more work for our clients than ever before.

### Reaching the heights of success

We continue to work hard for our partners and their applicants almost around the clock, answering phone calls until 9 p.m., chats until midnight and emails until well after midnight. Our turnaround times are impressive: less than two minutes for calls, three minutes for chats and five hours for emails. (By the way, everybody loves our chat bot. We plan to do more with it in the near future.)

It was a tough year, no question. Despite all of the chaos going on in the world, though, I wanted you to know about the outstanding job Liaison has done to help its partners maintain uninterrupted business continuity and achieve exceptional results in 2020. Our accomplishments during this time speak volumes about Liaison's unsurpassed desire and ability to help your institution reach new heights of success and efficiency.

Regardless of what else may be happening in the world at any given moment, when you partner with Liaison you'll have access to the same unparalleled resources and results that thousands of our partners rely on every day to stay focused on building better classes for their institutions. ■

**WANT TO READ MORE**  
about how Liaison pairs  
technology and processing  
services to streamline  
application management?  
Turn the page >

# WELCOME TO THE

CENTRALIZED  
APPLICATION  
SERVICE

# CAS<sup>TM</sup>

by LIAISON 

# COMMUNITY



**Higher Education Admissions Professionals  
Working Together for the Common Good**

It's always easier to achieve important goals when you're working with like-minded peers who share the same priorities, challenges and passion. Liaison's Centralized Application Service (CAS) Community makes that possible by facilitating new collaborations that drive mutual success for all participating schools and applicants.

CAS is a cloud-based recruiting and admissions solution for higher education institutions, programs and associations looking to grow and shape enrollment while reducing overall effort and costs. It allows students to apply to as many programs at as many participating institutions as they'd like by submitting only a single set of application materials. As an added benefit, members of the CAS Community convene regularly to share important insights, advice and success stories from the world of higher-ed admissions.

"The best way to meet the needs of today's reality is by partnering, creating communities and sharing best practices," said Liaison Client Delivery Manager Jillian Baer. "That's what we do at Liaison. We bring members of the CAS Community together to learn from schools that are doing it right. We leverage that collaborative spirit to make sure that all of our programs succeed and students can get the education they're looking for."

Here are four immediate benefits of joining the CAS Community.

### Benefit #1: CAS offers high value at no cost to your institution

When you join the CAS Community, your institution will receive a wide array of benefits at no cost, including:

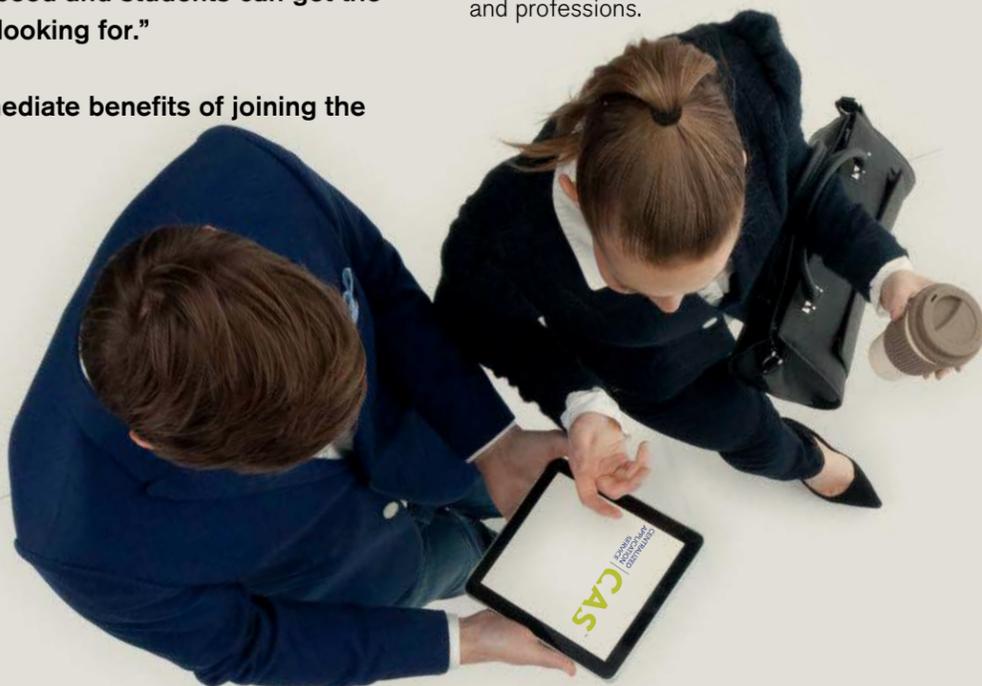
**Test score and foreign credential evaluation:** Through partnerships with virtually every global testing provider and transcript authority, Liaison streamlines the integration of official test scores and foreign credentials with your application data.

**Applicant support:** Liaison handles CAS applicant support, leaving the recruiting to you.

**Outsourcing of administrative tasks:** Liaison physically receives and scans transcripts, relieving your staff of that time-consuming burden. Your admissions office can then make decisions earlier in the cycle, beating competitors with offers to applicants and reclaiming time to focus on enrolling the right students.

**Analytics:** Cutting-edge reporting and analytics tools enable you to conduct trend analyses for benchmarking and forecasting purposes, providing you with the insight you need and the ability to compare your results to the cohort of participating colleges.

**The power of community:** CAS connects you with peers from other institutions who are also working toward universally important goals regarding engineering admissions, education and professions.



After our first cycle in BusinessCAS [the first and only CAS for business programs], we've seen a 44% increase in our class size. We were expecting significant results after we saw a 50% increase in applications just one month after launching the CAS, but this is beyond what we even imagined. Part of the credit for our numbers goes to having our programs listed in the only central directory of GME programs. This extra visibility has expanded our applicant pool, and our new, modern application experience has helped increase completed applications. On our staff's end, complementary application processing services have reduced our time to decision and our administrative workload while making it possible for us to review even more applications."

Dee Steidle  
Executive Director,  
MBA and MSB  
Programs



### Benefit #2: Admissions services ensure business continuity for admissions offices

Why do more than 31,000 programs at over 1,000 campuses use Liaison's admissions technology? The support services offered by a CAS are unparalleled in the admissions space. In the realm of application processing services, Liaison physically receives and scans transcripts, helping schools go paperless. This speeds packaging completion and decision times, allowing your institution to reclaim headcount and focus enrollment efforts on reaching the next level.

By allowing Liaison to perform these back-office tasks, your institution will protect itself from disruptive events and maintain business-as-usual admissions operations even if physical campuses must shut down their operations.

Liaison will even handle applicant support for process questions. We respond to questions about progress on the application, whether materials have been received and other questions related to the online application via phone, email or chat. Each year, Liaison processes more than two million documents and resolves more than one million calls, chats and emails, serving as an extension of thousands of admissions offices.

CAS can also serve as the postal point of contact for an admissions office, collecting and indefinitely storing all official transcripts electronically and in a secure physical facility for up to two admissions cycles.

On top of that, CAS's reporting capabilities enable you to conduct trend analyses for benchmarking and forecasting purposes so you no longer need to dig up data and crunch the numbers yourself.

Finally, unlike other admissions tools which would leave you to fend for yourself once you purchase the software, CAS provides peace of mind by offering continuous access to Liaison's highly experienced and responsive support staff. Liaison's professionals acts as a processing and services team for schools and programs and serve as a U.S.-based support center for applicants.



“The associated cost and time savings were main motivators in our decision to launch 10 CASs on our campus. Before CAS, at least four of our seven admissions counselors spent the majority of their time on administrative tasks. When you consider their average salary of \$50,000, CAS is helping us save \$200,000 on application processing. The best part is that we still employ those staff members, but CAS allows us to reallocate their efforts. They have more time to focus on recruiting and responding to prospective students’ inquiries — the work that actually helps us meet our enrollment goals.”

James Walter  
Director of Admissions



“One of the things that really attracted me to Liaison and EngineeringCAS™ [the first and only CAS for graduate engineering programs] was their ability to build communities within and across disciplines at the graduate level. They bring people together who are working with the same set of challenges, issues and budget constraints to share best practices in terms of how CAS can assist both the students and the institution, but also to have a forum to discuss issues, concepts and ideas.”

Poole continued, “Many times on the enrollment management side in graduate education, we’re working in a vacuum. But the more we work together, the stronger we’re going to be as a community of educators and institutions. In the long run, that will only help the students we serve in their education and career preparation.”

“It’s not just words and charts and technology,” he said. “Hopefully, people who are exploring the possibility of joining the CAS Community will see they have partners — regardless of the fact that they may be working at other institutions — who ultimately have the same goal to prepare the best students in their discipline. With CAS, Liaison provides the forum for all students and institutions to use a common platform to reach their goals, and in return to help make the world a better place.”

### Benefit #4: Marketing your school nationally and benchmarking against peers

As members of the CAS Community, programs have greater exposure to a larger application pool from across the country and even abroad. Programs often see a spike in applications after joining CAS — and, more importantly, an accompanying rise in quality.

Every institution that joins the CAS Community does so on the same footing. Small schools realize the same marketing boost as larger schools with better marketing budgets. By providing all schools and programs with access to great applicants, CAS levels the playing field while making it easier for students pursuing a profession to understand and consider all of their options.

Additionally, CAS pools data from its member schools and programs — and makes that aggregated information available to you. You can benchmark your programs against those of your peers — regionally and nationally — to see how well your message is being received and create more informed plans for improving outreach and yield. ■



Contact Liaison today to learn more about how joining the CAS Community can help you reach more applicants and build a better class. And please be sure to connect with us on LinkedIn at [lnedu.com/linkedin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/lnedu) to stay focused on the latest news, trends and discussions affecting higher-ed admissions and recruiting.

### When you join our community, CAS becomes your:

#### Marketing Agency

CAS increases your programs’ exposure, leverages outsourced marketing expertise and visualizes trends to expand your applicant pool.

- Expand your reach with new visibility in the searchable CAS program directory.
- Drive students to apply and to finish their applications with engaging automation.
- Make data-driven decisions about your messaging for smart next-cycle outreach.

#### Application Clearinghouse and Support Center

CAS combines highly customizable admissions management technology with processing services to streamline the submission and management of applications.

- Increase your productivity by outsourcing administrative admissions tasks.
- Cultivate early matriculant loyalty with a superior application experience that’s easier and quicker.
- Protect your admissions assets by digitizing, organizing, centralizing and securing all documents.

#### Enrollment Think Tank

CAS facilitates new collaborations to drive mutual success for all participating schools and applicants.

- Make data-driven decisions and be more strategic using benchmarking and reports.
- Try new approaches while mitigating risk when peers confide what they have tried.
- Act on industry trends with timely insights from exclusive magazines, ebooks and events.

#### Virtual IT Department

CAS delivers robust, customizable data management tools that save you time, money and IT resources.

- Protect your data with software that adheres to industry-standard security protocols.
- Centralize all information assets with one solution to collect, process, store, integrate and analyze datasets.
- Allocate resources effectively with an intuitive platform that admissions and enrollment staff can manage.

When you join the CAS Community, you can focus on what really matters: recruiting and engaging your best-fit students.

# DIGGING DEEPER

## How Graduate Engineering Programs Mine Data for Better Enrollment Outcomes

ENGINEERINGCAS by Ron Hyman  
Executive Director

One of the most important lessons engineering admissions leaders have learned during the pandemic is that traditional methods of recruiting, evaluating and communicating with applicants are no longer capable of producing the enrollment outcomes required for their programs' long-term success.

"There's no playbook on how to handle a pandemic," said Norman Fortenberry, Sc.D., Executive Director of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) during a recent EngineeringCAS webinar. "So now institutions are creating their own playbook. They're asking 'What can we do? What can we leverage?' I would suggest looking more closely at the data that admissions offices either already have or really should have as they move forward. Yet less than one third of institutions actually use data proactively around their enrollment management decisions. In times like this, when engineering education is facing so much uncertainty, it's more important than ever that we get a clear picture of the admissions landscape through the eyes of data."

In light of declining international enrollments, Fortenberry believes the most immediate solution is to find better ways of engaging domestic populations, especially women and underrepresented minorities.

EngineeringCAS, Liaison's Centralized Application Service (CAS) for graduate engineering programs, serves that function by giving admissions offices an improved way to recruit, enroll and admit best-fit engineering students

while saving money and better allocating staff resources each admissions cycle. EngineeringCAS is a data-rich global platform for driving applicant volume while providing an optimized applicant experience at no cost to participating programs, allowing you to focus on building better engineering classes.

### The Texas A&M story

The Texas A&M University College of Engineering joined EngineeringCAS in the fall of 2019 after looking for an application platform that offered an enhanced experience to applicants.

"We wanted to be able to provide our admissions staff, grad advisors and faculty the data they needed to make quicker and more strategic admissions decisions in order to meet our enrollment goals," said Tandilyn Morrel, Director of Graduate Programs for the College. "By joining EngineeringCAS — and by gaining access to Analytics by Liaison — we met those needs."

Analytics by Liaison presents data visually in charts, tables and other formats which users can easily customize based on a variety of filters, including applicant demographics, residency, citizenship, application progress and academic history.

"Regardless of the time period you review or filters you use, Analytics gives you a granular view of how your applicants may be changing over time," Morrel said. "At Texas A&M, being able to drill down into each graduate program's data has assisted us tremendously in evaluating whether our holistic admissions processes are working properly."

In addition, she appreciates the ability to download reports in a number of different file formats and import them into presentations.

"It makes it easy for us to share important data with other departments and individuals across campus," Morrel said. "For example, we can see exactly which counties in Texas our applicants are coming from. That, in turn, allows us to streamline our recruiting resources and determine how to best use them in the future."

### Reaching out

Morrel also likes the fact that Analytics by Liaison allows her to reach out to specific applicants, such as those who have not completed an application, and communicate with them directly. Prior to joining to EngineeringCAS, she could not do that.

"We did not know who those applicants were. Now we can reach out to them directly, either to help them complete the application or to recruit them into the program," she said.

"Analytics also provides a very easy way to gather data for jobs such as fulfilling state and national survey requests, compiling annual reports and assisting with analyses of outcomes. And it's great for faculty because it allows them to quickly obtain important data about applicants, as well as data they need to apply for and retain grants.

"Prior to joining EngineeringCAS and using Analytics, we had to submit data requests to an accountability office on campus. It could take several weeks before we heard back, and the data we received was not always in the format we needed. Joining the CAS has been a real game changer for us. We are now able to instantaneously find data and provide it to others on campus who need it. Across the board, this has increased transparency and helped us make better decisions."

In the short time Texas A&M has been in EngineeringCAS, Morrel has seen a 5% increase in completed applications.

"I can say with confidence that Texas A&M is very pleased with the results we have achieved by joining EngineeringCAS and using Analytics by Liaison to move forward in our admissions processes and to strategically build our admission cohort." ■

This article was based on Liaison's new on-demand webinar, **The Future Has Spoken: Listening to the Data to Drive Forward-Looking Strategies**. Watch the on-demand version at [Isnedu.com/future-spoken](https://Isnedu.com/future-spoken)

# ENROLLMENT MARKETING

by LIAISON



## Five Reasons to Re-Think Print!

HIGHLIGHTS FROM A LIAISON ENROLLMENT MARKETING WEBINAR

2020 introduced unprecedented challenges to enrollment management — and this was already an industry undergoing significant changes: increased competition for fewer students, reduced state funding and emerging demographic trends of Gen Z, to name a few.

2021 will continue to be a year of change and challenge, and more than anything else, it's proving to be a time to rethink processes, establish new efficiencies and develop new ways of marketing. Now is the time to embrace technologies like variable print which, while not new, have not been used to their full promise. Read on for five reasons to re-think the role of print in your enrollment marketing if you're looking for communication that's:

**Relevant** to students & families  
**Targeted** Quick to Deploy  
**Intelligent** Affordable Simple to Update  
**Customizable** Proven to increase engagement  
**Essential** to any campaign

\*National Association for College Admission Counseling and Salesforce.com study. (2020). Strategic Data Analytics in College Admissions Offices. [Isnedu.com/sfdc-data-report](https://www.nacac.org/sfdc-data-report)

### REASON N° 1 IT'S DELIVERED

Simply put, print is highly visible. We go to the mailbox every day. People like it: about 50% of customers prefer direct mail to all other forms of marketing.<sup>1</sup>

The average person receives 126 emails a day, and those are just the emails that make it through the filters. After that, the average open rate of most email campaigns is less than 18%.<sup>2</sup> There's a place for email, certainly, but print cuts through the noise in a way emails never will.

### REASON N° 2 IT'S TARGETED

We have established that print gets delivered. But after you've made it to the mailbox, you need your audience to engage with your mailing piece, to read it and share it.

How do you do that? By leading with messages and images that are relevant to your students' personal interests and concerns. If you're talking to a biology student, you need your best science lab image, alumnae stories, stats and profiles. Same for interior design, nursing, architecture or creative writing. Imagine how much more powerful your print piece is when it's relevant to its recipient.

The way to achieve that relevancy for each prospective student is through variable print. "Variable print" literally "varies" the words and images to target the recipient. It's the cost-effective, intelligent way to promote engagement.

### REASON N° 3 IT PLAYS WELL WITH OTHER CHANNELS

The importance of direct mail increases significantly when you partner it with other channels. We call this the "validation phenomenon." When someone gets a well-designed, targeted print piece, it validates their opinion of the product or service — and that validation drives up interaction with other channels.

We've tracked our clients, and the results are telling. Whenever a variable print piece is released, we'll suddenly see nearly a 40% higher open rate when compared to emails that aren't supported by mailings. Students are responding to the emails, but the print piece is validating the offer and driving those results.

Of course the pieces need to work together with a consistent message and call to action; variable print supports the brand.



<sup>1</sup> <https://act-on.com/blog/direct-mail-is-not-dead-top-4-ways-to-integrate-digital-and-direct-mail/>  
<sup>2</sup> [www.campaignmonitor.com](http://www.campaignmonitor.com)

## DEFINITIONS

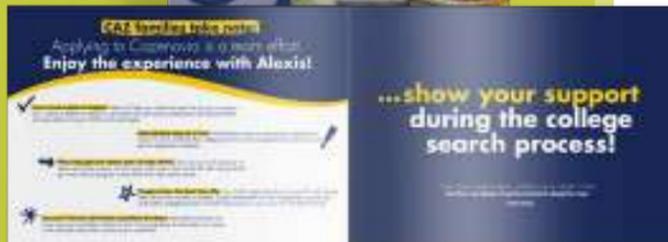
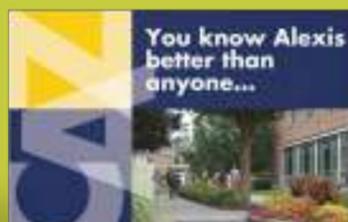
**VARIABLE PRINT** is personalization taken to the next level. While some basic solutions allow name and address personalization, true variable print allows you to "vary" majors, activities, hometowns, student profiles and more. Every student receives a completely customized print piece that speaks directly to their interests.

**ON-DEMAND PRINT** means you print only what you need. It means the end of boxes and boxes of marketing materials that are outdated the moment they hit the shelves. On-demand pieces are mailed almost immediately so you can keep your institution top of mind.

**INTELLIGENT PRINT** is print that uses data to drive the message. That data can include major or program of interest, athletics, activities, location, etc. That data is fed into a print engine to automatically create a print mailer that is one of a kind, just like your student. Intelligent print is immediate, relevant, automatic and connected.

Relevancy drives engagement. Relevancy means sending students (and their parents) a tailored, fully customizable message — in this case, via print — rather than an overwhelming generic marketing piece.





**REASON Nº 4 IT'S ECONOMICAL**

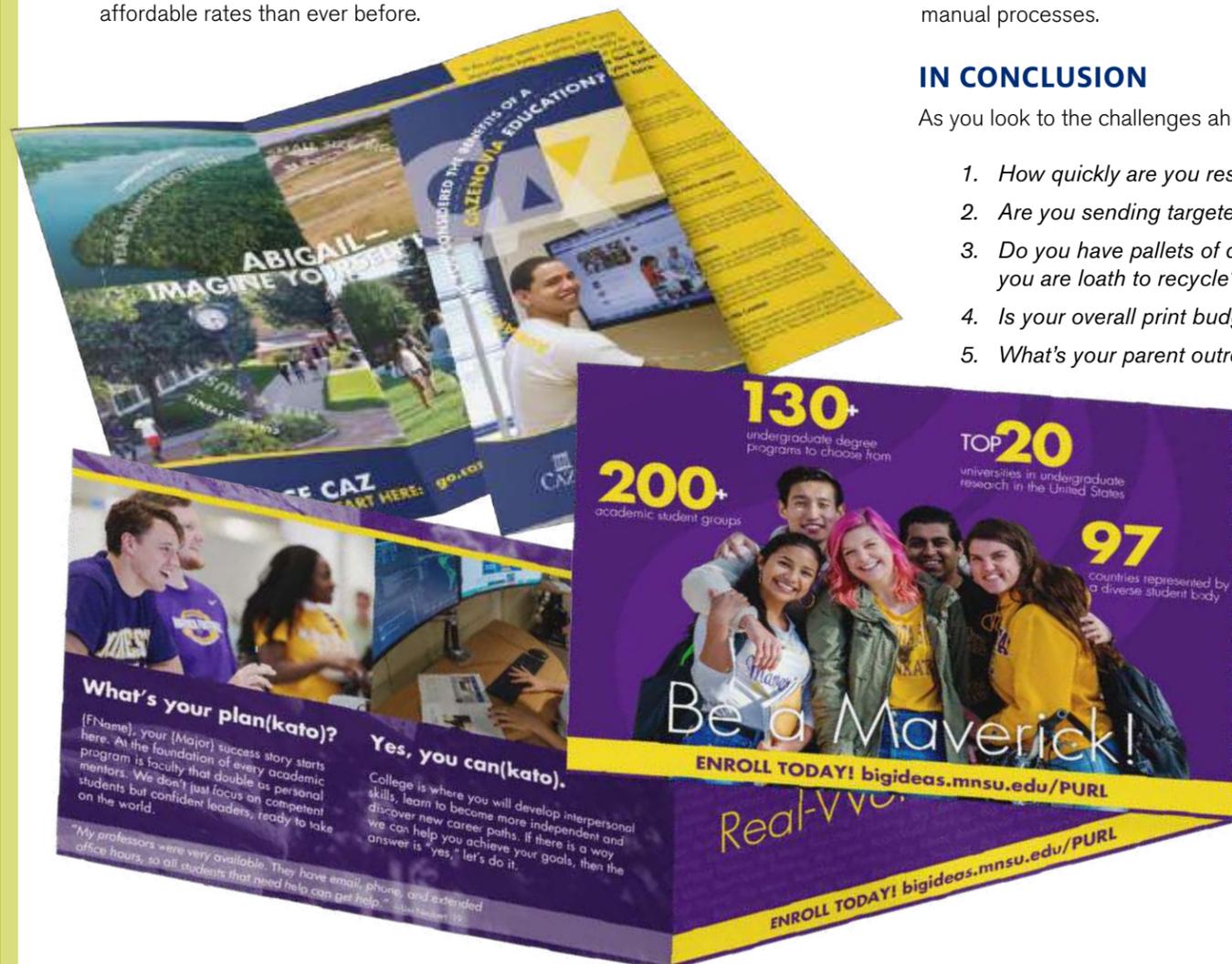
Variable printing seems like it would be more expensive, but the affordability comes from only printing what you need. A new piece is generated for each student — no more, no less.

Print on-demand is not only more relevant, it's less wasteful. The old way is printing thousands and thousands of marketing pieces each fall, only to find out there's an error in your copy, or you've earned an important new ranking — or unfortunately something happens like the current global pandemic and all of your processes and messaging must change immediately.

Now what do you do with your closet full of static, suddenly unusable or outdated print pieces? Every piece you recycle is money thrown away, never recovered. **Cazenovia College reported saving 35% off their print budget by switching to a variable model** — a very achievable goal.

**REASON Nº 5 IT'S MORE THAN A POSTCARD**

Returning to the concept of engagement, variable print also offers the opportunity to make your mailer stand out in exciting new ways. Modern printing technology can be applied to oversized, unusual shapes or three-dimensional mailers, even tubes and promo items. Postcards have a role in any communication flow but the technology has advanced to allow for so much more, at more affordable rates than ever before.



**Kristen Bowers**  
Associate Dean, Admissions,  
Cazenovia College



**GOING FURTHER**

**The old way:** Huge books, bigger quantities. Produced annually and unchanged until the next cycle. Everyone gets the same message.

Today, institutional websites have replaced “everything-but-the-kitchen-sink” marketing pieces for many colleges and universities. Yet our student inquiry research found that many colleges are still using these kinds of viewbooks. We looked at more than 90 of these. We found that 22-page books are the norm, with each book at 8 1/2 x 11 finished size, sent in a white envelope. How many of these are never read? And at what cost?

**On-demand printing works differently.** Imagine a student requests a brochure any time, day or night, from your website. That order is loaded automatically into our print engine with all of the necessary variables (like major, etc.). The next morning, their unique piece is printed and addressed. **It's in the mail within 24 hours** and arrives in the student's mailbox in three to four days.

Maybe that student also completed request forms at two other colleges that night. The admissions team that responds immediately has a distinct advantage over the team that's bogged down with manual processes.

**IN CONCLUSION**

As you look to the challenges ahead, ask yourself:

1. How quickly are you responding to your inquiries?
2. Are you sending targeted messaging or is it generic?
3. Do you have pallets of questionable or outdated materials you are loath to recycle?
4. Is your overall print budget being trimmed?
5. What's your parent outreach strategy?

And, the big one... *Are you doing all you can to bring in your best class?* **It's a lot to think about.** But with the current enrollment and admissions environment, rethinking print strategies has never been more relevant. ■

**A CLIENT PERSPECTIVE**

**Kristen, what are some of the creative ways that Cazenovia and your team are using on-demand printing?**

**KB:** My favorite piece is the financial aid offer. Financial aid is important to every single family, no matter their circumstances.

We introduced a tri-fold that is taking the place of the traditional financial aid award letter. It's colorful and offers a tremendous amount of information in terms of what each award means. It's also an invitation to take action, to set up a meeting with your admission or financial aid counselor. When that hits the mail, it's not in a white envelope with a white letter. It's in a clear envelope so you see the piece and its relevancy immediately.

In addition, we're seeing sophomores taking a stronger interest in their college search so we send an initial postcard. But we don't send a standard size. This is a starting point for our engagement.

**How has on-demand printing affected your budget?**

**KB:** Printing on-demand has definitely allowed us to be budget conscious and make some great strides in saving money. And also it's better for the environment; I don't miss the pallets at all!

In working with our business office and auditors, we discovered a 35% reduction in print costs, which occurred during our first year with Liaison. It goes back to being able to print on demand and not having thousands of view books printed because you think you're going to use them and ultimately, you don't.

**What other advantages have you seen?**

**KB:** We're focused on flexibility. Being able to make changes has been a huge advantage. It's been so efficient. For example, we recently changed our athletic conference. We added major options. Now we can make changes at any point in the cycle without any delay in processing. We're continuing to provide up-to-date information to students, but it's also a very, very cost-conscious process.

**THE PARENT FACTOR**

One trend remains constant: **Parents have the biggest influence on a student's college decision.** For undergraduate admissions, overlooking the parent conversation is a major missed opportunity, and direct mail is often the only way to gain access to parents. Targeting your messages to parents' concerns (affordability and location are top issues right now) can make a big impact on your engagement rates.

Parents understand what their child is looking for, and they want to see that reflected in the materials they receive. For a parent, the latest program ranking, a relevant student success story, and a tailored affordability message will have resonance and prompt the parent to engage with their student.



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## DEB ERDNER

Vice President, CAS Operations, Liaison

As Vice President of CAS Operations, Deb works extensively with Liaison's association partners and their member institutions while also overseeing the company's Customer Solutions Managers (CSMs) and training teams. Before coming to Liaison in 2004, Deb was Director of Admissions at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine where she was responsible for the recruitment, admission and retention of students applying to the Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine program. Deb holds an M.S. in organizational development and leadership from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and a B.A. in sociology from Wilkes University.



## JENNIFER RAAB

Learning Experience Designer, Liaison Academy

For over a decade, Jennifer has been a part of the higher education landscape in a variety of roles. She has worked in admissions, recruitment, communications, marketing and training. Fluent in both WebAdMIT and EMP, Jennifer has experience using the Liaison's software as both a Liaison client and as a Liaison employee.



## RON HYMAN

Executive Director, EngineeringCAS

Ron serves as Liaison's Executive Director of CAS Development and as the Executive Director of EngineeringCAS. He joined Liaison in 2015 and engages strategic partners to identify, co-create and take to market Liaison's CAS platform for new global initiatives. In 2006, Ron co-founded Avow Systems, the first provider of secure electronic PDF transcripts for higher ed. As General Manager, he was responsible for all aspects of the company. In 2012, Avow was acquired by Parchment, where Ron was Senior Vice President and was instrumental in the integration of the two companies.



## STEPHEN TAYLOR

Research Director, BusinessCAS

Stephen is Research Director for the BusinessCAS Community and has served in senior leadership roles for Arizona State University's W.P. Carey School of Business, Thunderbird School of Global Management and Harvard Business School Executive Education.



## SASHA PETERSON

CEO, TargetX

Sasha is responsible for the strategic direction and day-to-day operations of TargetX. Upon joining the business, he oversaw the expansion of TargetX's product offerings to extend more deeply into the student lifecycle and drove the "mobile-first" design paradigm, which puts the student experience first. Prior to joining TargetX, Sasha held a variety of executive leadership roles at top education technology firms, including President of Hobsons EMT and Vice President of Partnerships at Altius Education.



## JOHN TIERNEY

Director of Partnerships, SlideRoom

John has nearly 20 years' experience in higher education technology and services for enrollment management and student success. He also served in a corporate development role at Arizona State University and as an adjunct professor for multiple institutions.

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