

# MODERN ENROLLMENT

ISSUE NO.1 SUMMER/FALL 2021

WHAT WILL YOUR  
ENROLLED CLASS  
*Graduating*  
LOOK LIKE?

Brought to you by **LIAISON** 

# WELCOME TO *MODERN ENROLLMENT*

Thank you for reading the premier issue of *Modern Enrollment*, Liaison's new magazine highlighting the strategies and technology successful colleges and universities are using to achieve their most important class-building priorities.

Of course, it's ultimately the power of the people behind technology that makes achieving recruitment, admissions, enrollment and student success goals possible. That's why Liaison has spent years assembling the most powerful group of total enrollment experts in the industry — starting with our acquisition of Spectrum (and its award-winning Enrollment Marketing Platform, or "EMP") in 2007 and continuing with TargetX and, most recently, Othot. These moves have unquestionably positioned our team — but most importantly, our partners like you — at the center of the modern enrollment landscape.

Regardless of their institution's size, the question we're hearing in conversations with EMP, TargetX and Othot users — from everyone in higher ed, really — these days is, "What will the class that I'm enrolling look like?" That's important, but it's not enough. You also need to be able to answer the question, "What will my graduating class look like?" Liaison can help you answer both, and one way that we do this is by sharing insights like those that you'll find in this magazine.

In the following pages, for example, Common App President and CEO Jenny Rickard, Ph.D., shares her thoughts on building stronger pipelines between undergrad and grad programs. Elsewhere, we feature enrollment success stories from a wide range of different schools, offer tips on increasing student engagement and re-examine the benefits of using customized print pieces in outreach strategies.

There's a lot more, too, including articles about 2021 enrollment trends from the data scientists at Othot, the difference between Gen Z and millennial students and racial equality and culturally responsive learning experiences.

Enjoy!



**Sasha Peterson**  
CEO of TargetX  
CIO of Liaison

**LIAISON** 

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MODERN  
ENROLLMENT

# THE UNDERGRADUATE-TO-GRADUATE CONNECTION:

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

When 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 Ph.D.

"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."

*This article is based on comments made during "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). ■*



**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."

# PANDEMIC OR NOT, ST. CLOUD STATE IS "GETTING MORE, BETTER AND EARLIER APPLICANTS"

St. Cloud State University has managed to achieve the type of impressive growth during the pandemic that most higher ed institutions could only dream about, including new graduate student enrollment increases of 10% in Summer 2020, 8% in Fall 2020 and 25% in Spring 2021.

According to Sean Pitzer, Associate Director of Graduate Admissions, that recent success is attributable to several decisions the Minnesota school made before the pandemic, such as moving programs online, increasing its recruiting presence on the global stage and joining Liaison's GradCAS. GradCAS is the Centralized Application Service (CAS) that allows a student to apply to multiple graduate degree programs on one campus, or to multiple programs across multiple campuses, by submitting a single application for enrollment.

## AT THE FOREFRONT

"GradCAS has opened us up to new audiences," Pitzer said. "As a regional comprehensive university, our fundamental mission has been to serve the region and state; as we have continued evolving to meet the needs of an increasingly interconnected global society in the 21st century, that footprint has expanded nationally and internationally. Liaison complements institutional strategies by driving potential applicants to GradCAS, where they have an opportunity to search for programs of interest. If we have what they're searching for based on academic offerings, location, delivery method, degree type or admission cycles, their query brings up St. Cloud State and puts our name at the forefront of their consciousness."

Pitzer said St. Cloud State's use of GradCAS as its application review system has been a game changer.

"GradCAS allows us to communicate very quickly by aligning institutional communication strategies alongside Liaison's communication programming to prospective and in-progress applicants, as well as admitted students," he explained. "The increased communication means we have a lower application abandonment rate, an increased application submission rate and a faster admission offer or decision notification. The tool is quite simple to use and easy to manage."

And Pitzer has noticed that more students are submitting applications earlier in the cycle now: "Work that tended to happen in June, July and August appears to be happening in February and March."

"In the years prior to joining GradCAS, our application submission rate was 42% - 45%. During our first full cycle with GradCAS, our submission rate increased to almost 50%."



Sean Pitzer  
Associate Director of  
Graduate Admissions



"Summer applications and admission offers are up 16% and 27% from last year, respectively. Fall admissions are up 10%. We are seeing a lot of early movement with people completing tasks to continue their journey to and through our graduate programs."

## OPENING THE FOURTH DIMENSION

According to Pitzer, being able to communicate faster with prospective students and get decisions out quicker is making a difference at St. Cloud State. Taking advantage of Liaison's Enrollment Marketing Platform (EMP™) is part of his strategy for making that happen. EMP is a complete marketing and CRM solution that transforms how schools manage recruiting and admissions.

"GradCAS and EMP have opened the fourth dimension for our graduate students," Pitzer said. "GradCAS imports data to EMP multiple times daily, immediately updating student information while setting up analysis mechanisms based on activities and behaviors. At each stage, a communication is delivered overnight via email, text or snail mail urging progression to the next stage, whatever that may be."

"We leverage check-listed items on a personalized URL (PURL) so applicants know exactly what's missing and admitted students know their next steps. No transcripts uploaded? No check mark. No recommendation letters received? No check mark. Students always know the status of their files, which in many cases allows us to deflect inbound phone calls and emails into the self-service environment. Staff are processing files instead of answering emails to see if a transcript or a recommendation has arrived."

St. Cloud State's email read rate and consequential engagements are "wild to see," Pitzer said.

"I have learned that applicants and admitted students will do exactly what you ask them to do and their behaviors are highly predictable. They are hungry to consume our information as they plan their futures. Fast, useful and informative communications are critical, and we managed to hit a sweet spot with speed and content."

## A RECIPE FOR GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY

Pitzer believes being a member of the GradCAS Community has led to an increase in the number of applications submitted by students who had not previously been on St. Cloud State's radar.

"We know Liaison is working to generate applications on our behalf," he said. "At last count, 70 applicants indicated that a GradCAS search was the sole way they learned about our programs. That is close to 5% of our submitted application volume to date. These are people who likely would not have discovered our programs if we were not members of the GradCAS Community."

"The combination of a user-friendly application system, strategic marketing efforts and a highly engaged program director is a recipe for growth and an opportunity to crack into new markets that support institutional and program diversity initiatives," he said. "We're getting more, better and earlier applicants."

Pitzer continued: "We're a small shop. We couldn't do this without the support of the GradCAS team. It's an actual relationship with Liaison because, ultimately, we have mutual interests in our success providing a better user experience for applicants, application review committees and staff." ■

During the two and a half years from January 2018 through July 2020, St. Cloud State sent just 879 emails to inquiring students, plus one email to submitted applicants annually. In the six months after launching EMP, St. Cloud State sent out more than 90,000 emails to prospective students.

St. Cloud State University is a public institution in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Its total graduate enrollment is approximately 1,700 students.

The School of Graduate Studies manages:

- Three doctoral programs
- 50+ master's programs
- 30+ graduate certificates
- Three post-master's and specialist programs
- 200+ undergraduate programs

# From Click to Enroll: 3 Tips to Increase Student Email Engagement

In a survey of college-bound high school students by NRCCUA and TargetX, 86% of rising seniors indicated they not only preferred to communicate with colleges by email but that they did so using a mobile device. How can college marketers and recruiters competing for the attention of these students increase the odds that your email recipients will see your messages and click through your call to enroll? It all starts with designing email content for a 5-inch screen.



## Keep It Simple

Did you know that mobile email clients like Gmail or Apple Mail may clip the content of any email exceeding 100kb leaving the recipient to only see an abridged version of your message less they click a link to view the email in its entirety in a browser? Talk about a conversion killer.

We can start to combat this with scaling down our copy. Leave the work of delivering the long-winded "hard sell" pitch to your admissions counselors, student ambassadors, campus tour guides and alumni. We all play a role in the recruitment of students. For those crafting strategic marketing communications, our job is to get across one message at a time. Keep it simple. Keep it pithy.

Limit your images to one header, or eliminate images entirely. Not only will this help remedy bloated email file sizes, but it may also increase the odds that your message doesn't get relegated to a Promotions tab or spam folder.

## The Inverted Pyramid

Taught in every freshman journalism course, the inverted pyramid remains one of the most widely used and time tested structures in mass media writing for a reason: it works. We're taught this style of writing originated with the invention of the telegraph as it was important to get the most important details of a story transmitted first in the event of a lost connection.

Similarly, as email marketers, we're competing against the potential loss of attention by our readers who are consuming content as quickly as their thumbs can scroll. We can apply this writing principle in both a synonymous and even more literal sense to get the clicks we seek.

The inverted pyramid structure instructs us to organize our message into three sections: the lead, the body and the tail. The lead in our email message should be an attention grabbing headline or image header that clearly articulates your purpose for writing the student. The body of your email, for our purposes, is there to build anticipation. It provides contextual information, but also, let's assume your reader is scanning and will not consume the finer details of this text. For this reason, and those reasons illustrated above, we keep our message brief while visually driving the eyes of our reader to the link we want them to click. This is the tail of the message, and when done well, creates a very real inverted pyramid observable by the discriminating eye.



The application of this strategy is limited only by one's own creativity. How many questions can you ask your students through buttons or emojis that can aid your recruitment team in identifying next steps or help filter your recipients into new, automated communication streams? This question for many is the starting point for growing and transforming your marketing communication strategy from that of a bullhorn to an authentic dialog that effectively nurtures relationships that translate to enrollment results. ■



## Pushing Buttons

If you adopt the advice of conservatively limiting content per email to minimize file size, and organizing your content to grab the attention of your reader and attract their eyeballs to the bottom of your email through the inverted pyramid approach, then you'll be set up to capitalize on this one final tip: give your reader a button to push.

People are obsessed with pushing buttons. Seriously, humans have a psychological predisposition to button pushing that has been well studied and documented. This isn't hype; it's science. TargetX's partners at Maryville University reported a 127% CTA increase in one A/B campaign when replacing a standard text hyperlink with an actionable button image.

Have faith in the strength of your message and the importance of your call to enroll. Too many college marketers evidence an insecurity in their emails by hyperlinking everything; desperate to get one click, they provide the reader with five links to choose from. This only serves to distract and disengage your reader. Remember: one email, one purpose, one button.

As with all rules, there is an exception, and in this case, the exception can be an equally effective strategy. That exception being a "call to emote." In 2019, TargetX partner Belmont Abbey College successfully generated a dramatic increase in post-campus visit surveys from their prospective students when they adopted a binary approach to asking "How was your campus visit experience?" In lieu of one button link driving students to complete a multiple-question survey, they replaced the button with two clickable images: a smiley face and a sad face. With one click, the student or parent can express whether they enjoyed their visit or not. It's that simple.

# 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

(Continued on next page)

## 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. ■

# Best Practices: Tracking Vaccine

## Records in TARGETX

Many schools are planning for students returning to campus in the fall and are thinking about how best to track students' vaccination status, whether or not it is required for campus re-entry.

TargetX has also been thinking about the different options that schools have for this and wanted to provide some best practices for collecting and recording the necessary data.

### Consult with your legal team

Before starting to collect this kind of data, make sure that you consult with your legal team to ensure that you are going to be FERPA compliant.

### If you don't need it, don't collect it

One of the most important things to consider when collecting your students' vaccine statuses (or any other piece of information!) is how you will use the information. Are you going to allow only vaccinated students to attend certain sessions at your orientation? If so, it may be worth collecting. However, if you don't have a defined purpose for the information for admissions, you may be better off to just move on and leave the information gathering to your medical staff when they collect their other vaccination records.

Collecting unnecessary information in TargetX will bog down your contact records with data that isn't actually useful and make it harder to find what you're looking for in the future.

### Identify who needs access

Before you start gathering any vaccination data, identify who needs access to it. For this kind of sensitive health information, you should strive to limit the number of people who have access to the field. Once you've identified who truly does need to be able to see it, consider creating a custom permission set to limit access to the field to only those necessary users.

### Create custom fields

If you do want to collect this data, we recommend one or two custom fields:

- ✓ A boolean on the contact record called "COVID-19 Vaccine Received," where the box is checked if the student has indicated they've received a vaccine, and;
- ✓ (Optional) A date field called "COVID-19 Vaccine Last Dose Administered" to track the specific date when the vaccine was received.

From these fields, users with the appropriate permissions will be able to use them like any other field in TargetX to report, segment communications and assign groups as well as all the other TargetX features.

If you have any questions about tracking vaccination status in your CRM, please don't hesitate to contact your Client Success Manager. ■

**"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

**COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card**  
Please keep this record card, which includes medical information about the vaccines you have received.  
Por favor, guarde esta tarjeta de registro, que incluye información médica sobre las vacunas que ha recibido.

First Name

Patient number ( medical record IIS

Date



# CONFUSE THEM AT YOUR OWN RISK: How Gen Z Students Differ From Millennials

If you want to come across as outdated, out of touch and unconcerned about the future of your college or university, just work with your “Generation Z” applicants the same way you’ve been interacting with millennials.

Of course, a better strategy would be to recognize the key differences between these two cohorts of students and then adjust how your institution communicates with them and tries to address their needs. That’s particularly important these days, as recent studies have indicated that many of today’s applicants and students are reconsidering their college future in light of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. You don’t want to lose students because your communications with them didn’t resonate.

## Who’s who?

The age ranges may vary by a few years depending on the sources you consult, but generally speaking, millennials are defined as those born between 1980 and 1995, whereas Generation Z comprises those born between 1996 and 2015 (or so).

To better understand the differences between the generations, however, it may be more informative to focus on what has occurred during their lives rather than simply look at their dates of birth.

For example, some demographers suggest the most significant demarcation between the generations is Sept. 11, 2001, which many members of Generation Z do not recall. Others believe the defining difference is the economic environment in which they grew up. While millennials are more likely to remember a childhood played out against the backdrop of a relatively prosperous economy, Gen Z students and applicants are more likely to recall the financial hardships that burdened millions of families — perhaps including their own — during the “Great Recession” that began in 2008.

Consequently, Generation Z is more likely to place a high value on the return on investment provided by a college education. Whereas millennials may have grown up thinking about college as an experience to be savored for its own sake, Gen Z students are more inclined to think about the future financial value it can provide via access to jobs that pay well.

## What does it mean for higher ed?

As a result, Generation Z is more likely to be concerned about long-term financial security — and see college as essential to success in life. Consider the differences in the generations’ responses to the following statements:

**“My goal is to make it to the top of my profession/future profession one day.”**  
65% of Generation Z said “yes,” compared with 43% of millennials.<sup>1</sup>

**“College is an important steppingstone for future success.”**  
67% of Generation Z, 61% of millennials.<sup>1</sup>

**“I can have a rewarding career without going to college.”**  
25% of Generation Z, 40% of millennials.<sup>1</sup>

The two generations also prefer to learn differently. For example, 59% of Generation Z says YouTube is their preferred way of learning; 60% of millennials prefer printed books. And despite their love of social media, members of Generation Z are less likely to prefer taking online classes whenever possible (26% vs. 45%).<sup>1</sup>

Despite a lack of research on the topic, anecdotal evidence also suggests that the parents of Generation Z students are much more involved in the college selection process than older parents. Furthermore, some admissions professionals believe that Generation Z has unprecedented expectations of customer service during the application process. That may even include a belief that schools are responsible for collecting application materials, rather than an understanding that students are responsible for submitting them.

## Making marketing matter

In order to connect with Generation Z, colleges and universities need to meet them on their own terms. First of all, that

involves developing highly personalized, omnichannel digital communication strategies to reach them before, during and after the application process. Those strategies shouldn’t be limited to students, though. Considering the major role their parents are likely to play in the decision-making process, it’s a good idea to conduct parallel marketing campaigns for each household: one for the Gen Z student, one for the parents or guardians.

Once you have their attention, focus less on trying to sell them on the experience of attending your school and more on emphasizing the long-term financial benefits. Remember, to them, paying for college is a major investment. They want tangible outcomes, such as good jobs and a rewarding career path. They don’t want to be underemployed after graduation, struggling to pay off student loans. To demonstrate the value of a degree from your school, consider showing them how much graduates earn once they enter the workforce.

Finally, keep in mind that Generation Z has largely upended the traditional notion that a college needs to be a “good fit” for a student. Instead, they want to know if they will be a good fit. That means your application process needs to focus on who they are as people, not just on their grades or how great your campus is. Encouraging Generation Z students to share what’s important in their lives — such as by encouraging them to upload multi-media portfolios that illustrate their passions and personality — lets them know they’ll be valued on your campus. Without that guarantee, you run the risk of losing them. ■

<sup>1</sup>Source: Pearson.com, *Beyond Millennials: The Next Generation of Learners*, 2018.



# 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/sfcd-data-report](https://www.collegeboard.com/sfcd-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 a 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 N° 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 N° 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 admissions 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.

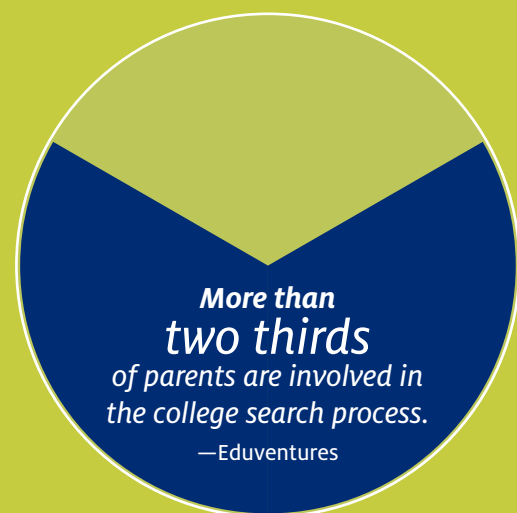
**What other advantages have you seen?**

**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.



# 2021 Enrollment Trends:

## What Do They Mean Now, For Fall '22, and Beyond?

**othot**™  
A LIAISON COMPANY

by Chris Lucier,  
Director of Partner Relationships  
Former Vice President of Enrollment, University of Delaware

May 1 is National Admissions Decision Day, when most high school seniors who go to college decide where they intend to enroll for the coming fall. For higher education institutions, that day brings reflection and analysis to determine what they can still do to meet their Fall '21 first-year student enrollment goals. Equally critical—what revisions should be made to tactics and strategies to recruit and enroll the Fall '22 class and beyond.

Each year, to aid in assessing the previous admissions cycle, Othot, the leading provider of AI for higher education institutions, analyzes enrollment data from its partner institutions. Othot's partner institutions and other schools use the analysis to benchmark and gauge progress to goals. While 2021 has been marked by many challenges, notably the COVID-19 pandemic and test-optional admissions, the research shows some positive signs for Fall '21 first-time student enrollment.

### The Data Driving the Analysis

Othot collected and analyzed enrollment data from its partner institutions on March 1, April 1 and May 1, specifically:

- Applications
- FAFSA Submissions
- Admits
- Deposits

*Othot collects the data monthly through the Fall Census and issues an annual report on enrollment trends in the fall.*

The schools in the study represent a cross-section of the higher education landscape, including private and public, large and small, rural and urban and specialized programs. The analyzed data is presented in aggregate and segmented by institution type (public or private).

### Early Indicators for Fall '21

On May 1, 2021, several trends stood out from Othot's analysis:

- Overall, Othot partner institutions saw an increase in an aggregate application volume. Schools with more rigorous admissions standards drove the increase. Application volume among institutions with less rigorous admissions standards declined.
- Test-optional admissions affected application volume, admissions and deposits.
- FAFSA submissions increased over the prior year.
- Institutions admitted more students, presumably to mitigate the uncertainty related to COVID-19, i.e., reopening of campuses, requirements for vaccines, family concerns about the distance between home and college, the uncertainty brought by test-optional admissions and little to no on-campus recruitment programming.
- Public and private partner institutions received more deposits by May 1, 2021, but private institutions saw the largest percentage increase.

### A Deeper Dive Into the 2021 Enrollment Data

Overall Institution Trends % Change 2021 vs. 2020



	1-Mar	1-Apr	1-May
Overall Applicants	2.96%	4.44%	5.30%
Overall Admits	4.80%	7.61%	8.43%
Overall Deposits	4.24%	3.83%	15.61%
Overall FAFSA	7.19%	7.75%	8.82%

(Continued on next page)

## Overall Findings

### 2021 Applications

Schools did not let the pandemic get in the way of filling their funnels and generating additional applicants from prospective students, which increased overall for Othot's partner institutions. Applications also increased among schools with more rigorous admissions criteria, whereas ones with less rigorous admissions criteria declined. One reason for the rise in applications is the shift to test-optional admissions adopted by many schools. As reported in the *Wall Street Journal* article, "College Admissions Season Is Crazy Than Ever. That Could Change Who Gets In," colleges with test-optional admissions saw an 'unprecedented flood of applications.' That was true for Othot's partner institutions – removing the test requirement led to an increase in applications and subsequently admits.

### 2021 FAFSA Submissions

Looking back to January 1, 2021, FAFSA submissions increased 2.64% from 2020 to 2021 among Othot's partner institutions. Not only did this rate hold, but it more than doubled by March 1. Overall, FAFSA submission rates increased by nearly nine percent by May 1, 2021.

### 2021 Admits

As mentioned above, applications are up this year, and both public and private institutions have higher than average admit rates in 2021 compared to the previous year. On May 1, the admit rate had increased by 8.43% year-over-year. The data suggests that institutions are hedging against lower yield and admitting more students.

### 2021 Deposits

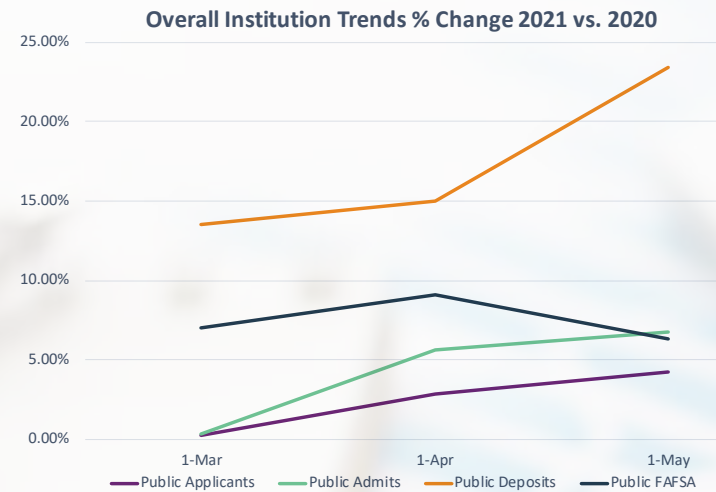
Deposits in March and April took a different shape than applications and admits. Across the aggregated data for Othot's partner institutions, deposits on March 1 increased by 4.24% over 2020. However, this increase was decidedly lopsided. Deposits declined by 3.38% for public institutions and increased by 13.55% for private institutions. The good news - deposit rates recovered later in the enrollment cycle.

## Findings by Institution Type

### Private Institutions

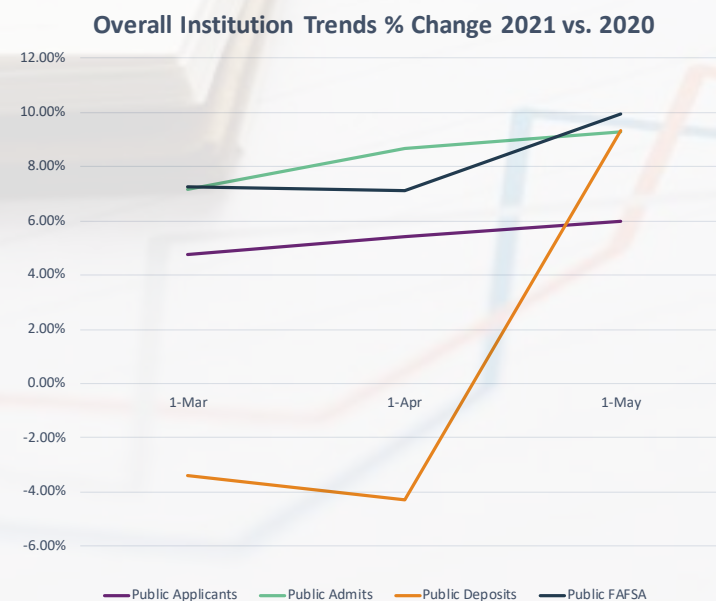
From March 1 to May 1, applicants, admission rates and deposits were ahead of 2020 for private institutions. As of May 1, 2021, deposits were 23 percent higher than on May 1, 2020.

Several of Othot's partner institutions delayed the May 1, 2020 deposit deadline to June 1, 2020. The change may account for the large gap in deposits between 2020 and 2021.



### Public Institutions

Larger applicant pools for public partner institutions led to an increase in FAFSA completion and admits in 2021 when compared to 2020. While deposits were initially down compared to 2020 on March 1 and April 1, 2021, they were ahead by more than nine percent over 2020 on May 1, 2021.



## 2021, The Year of Test-Optional Admissions

According to Fairtest.org, two-thirds of all U.S. colleges and universities were test-optional or test-blind for Fall 2021 applicants. It is one of the most significant changes to college admissions, notwithstanding the pandemic. With testing sites closed, students could not take the SAT, ACT or other exams traditionally used to evaluate applications and financial aid.

Many of Othot's partner institutions adopted test-optional for admissions, removing a barrier for students. Students responded—applicant rates were higher than expected, and many applied to more institutions, including those not previously considered. Public institutions had a closer distribution across applicants, admits and deposits. Private institutions had a 50/50 split in test-optional deposited students as compared to a 35/65 split at the applicant stage. The following table breaks out the test-optional percentages from Othot's partner institutions by institution type.

### Test-Optional Applicants, Admits, Deposits by Institution Type.

May 1 Results	Overall	Private	Public
Test-Optional Applicants	61.77%	63.02%	61.53%
Test Score Applicants	38.23%	36.98%	38.47%
Test-Optional Admits	56.79%	55.56%	56.90%
Test Score Admits	43.27%	44.44%	43.10%
Test-Optional Deposits	54.65%	50.94%	55.06%
Test Score Deposits	45.35%	49.06%	44.94%

The question many institutions are asking is: Are test-optional admissions here to stay? The sheer number of test-optional applicants alone is driving some institutions to re-evaluate their admissions criteria and merit-based scholarship structure for the Fall 2022 cycle.

## What Do These Trends Mean For the 2021 Enrollment Cycle?

The pandemic began to impact the 2020 enrollment cycle in mid-March 2020. Declines were inevitable because of the uncertainty surrounding the virus and its impact on students, their families, institutions and the economy.

Based on Othot's analysis, the 2021 results seem promising. However, many factors contribute and add to the uncertainty in what was already a very turbulent admissions environment. Those factors include test-optional admissions, a year of primarily virtual interactions and uncertainty surrounding how institutions will operate in the fall.

As you review your institution's results, monitor other key data elements very closely to implement interventional tactics to mitigate melt and provide reliable projections for the academic and student-life units and the budget office. Start comparing, in detail, data points that are behavioral in nature, such as attending orientation, registering for classes, completing housing contracts, paying bills or setting up installment plans and assessing other activities that can clarify the intent of a student who has deposited and will actually be enrolled as of the Fall Census. For instance, do you know which students deposited but haven't attended or registered for orientation? What are you doing about that? Or, in early August, you identify students who attended orientation but didn't return their housing deposit on time and haven't paid their fall bill or set up an installment plan. What are you going to do?

(Continued on next page)

2021 Enrollment Trends:  
What Do They Mean Now, For Fall '22, and Beyond?

## What Do These Trends Mean For the 2022 Enrollment Cycle and Beyond?

There are many questions you should be asking and assessing as you develop your Fall '22 tactics and longer-term strategies. The impact of COVID-19 will extend several more years, and more and more institutions will be affected by demographic changes. It is a mistake to merely go back to the same tactics and strategies used before COVID-19.

### Here are some questions you should be asking:

- ❓ Is student mobility still the same? Do students want to go to college closer to home?
- ❓ Whether it is student mobility that has declined alone or in combination with the drop in the number of high school students going to college, how do you develop new markets effectively and efficiently?
- ❓ Are you planning to retain test-optional practices for Fall '22 admissions and beyond?
- ❓ Without test scores, will your financial aid leveraging model achieve enrollment goals related to quality, diversity, academic program, access and student success while maximizing net tuition revenue after aid? What other behavioral variables could substitute for test scores?
- ❓ Are you going back to a full slate of in-person recruitment programs? What virtual programs are working? Are those more efficient than in-person programs?
- ❓ Are you focusing your marketing and recruitment resources on increasing a prospective student's likelihood to apply and enroll if admitted? With constrained resources, are you getting the biggest bang for your buck?

## Bottom Line: It Ain't Over Until It's Over!

Comparing your institution to regional and national trends is important, but only if you critically analyze the comparison to uncover what it means to you in the near and long term and revise actions and plans to increase the likelihood of success. Actionable data is power, and the Othot team stands ready to help you and your colleagues uncover and act on those insights.

## Follow 2021 Enrollment Trends

Visit Othot's blog for regular updates on 2021 enrollment trends: [othot.com/blog](http://othot.com/blog), or download the 2020 Enrollment Trends Pulse Report to see where your institution stacked up: [othot.com/2021-futureproof-institution-against-demographic-cliff-report](http://othot.com/2021-futureproof-institution-against-demographic-cliff-report).



## About the Author:

Chris Lucier is the Director of Partner Relationships at Othot, leveraging over 20 years of experience in admissions and strategic enrollment management to help colleges and universities adopt data-driven decision making in addressing enrollment and student success challenges.

Before joining Othot in 2019, Lucier was the Vice President for Enrollment Management at the University of Delaware (UD), where he developed, implemented, assessed and refined a management strategy to mitigate the challenges presented by a volatile enrollment environment. In this capacity, he was responsible for undergraduate admissions, the registrar's office and student financial services. Prior to UD, he was the Vice President for Enrollment Management at the University of Vermont, where he developed and shaped the overall enrollment strategy and implemented operational programs to recruit, admit, retain and graduate undergraduate students. In 2001, after a 21-year career as a U.S. Army Officer, Lucier started his career in higher education as Director of Recruitment & Operations in the University of Michigan Office of Undergraduate Admissions.

Lucier received his undergraduate degree from the University of Arizona and a Master of Public Administration degree from Western Kentucky University. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

# By Funding Their “Power of X” Grant, TargetX Employees Make a Personal Impact on the Lives of Students in Need



by Sasha Peterson,  
CEO of TargetX  
CIO of Liaison

As a company, TargetX is committed to giving back and ensuring every student is provided the necessities to help them be mentally, emotionally and physically prepared for school. Through our Power of X team, we have worked to nurture and expand TargetX's annual commitment of giving back to our local communities and our clients. Supported by leadership as well as staff in every department of the company, the Power of X team has not only raised money and resources but shown up in person in local communities to bring food, clothing and laptops to those in need.

Starting in 2019, our employees came together to develop the “Power of X” grant, an initiative that directly impacts student success at a TargetX client institution. This grant is fully funded by employees and over the past three years, we have raised nearly \$35,000 – and have awarded grants ranging from \$11,000 to \$15,000.

## Supporting Student Success

“The Power of X grant is something I'm super proud to be a part of,” said TargetX Client Success Manager Kristi Kooyma. “It's so fun and impactful to tell our customers this is an employee-funded grant. It shows just how much we as individuals care about our work in higher ed, about our clients and especially about their efforts to help ensure their students' success!”

“With the financial impact of the pandemic, the challenges of supporting students have only compounded,” she added. “This grant makes a real difference in the lives of individual students — we've seen that for two years in a row now. I'm excited to see what kind of impact it has this year.”

Washtenaw Community College (WCC) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, was the first recipient of the established Power of X grant, which funded the Washtenaw Community College Foundation Emergency Fund.

**Our next grant recipient was announced at the Liaison User Conference on July 16, 2021. Congratulations to Western Connecticut State University! Subscribe to Modern Enrollment so you don't miss our article highlighting this amazing institution in our next issue at [liaisonedu.com/modern-enrollment](http://liaisonedu.com/modern-enrollment)**

The fund was designed to assist WCC students with unforeseen emergencies that occur during the school year and that might compromise their ability to stay in school. WCC students apply through a private and confidential system and receive responses typically within 24 - 48 hours. The Student Emergency Fund provides support for food insecurity through grocery store gift cards and access to the WCC Emergency Food Pantry, as well as help with car repairs, book vouchers, rent assistance to avoid evictions, payments to prevent utility shutoffs and other types of payments that can help students overcome barriers to completing their college education.

In 2020, the University of Akron's ZipAssist program was selected, receiving \$15,000 in grant funding. ZipAssist serves as the student support and advocacy office for the University. The funding supported nearly 30 low-income, first generation incoming students by providing them with the technology needed to succeed academically, regardless of whether the campus was open in Fall 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the program offered ongoing mentorship and check-in meetings that allowed the staff to monitor the students' academic progress and ensure each student was doing well personally.

TargetX employees then continued to step it up by offering additional funding that allowed us to also provide five Micro Power of X grants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recipients of the unrestricted funding in the amount of \$1,000 included the University of New Mexico, University of Nevada – Reno, St. Thomas Aquinas, Central Texas College and Prairie State College.

Now, as a part of the Liaison International family, the Power of X grant initiative continues to grow, with employees across all of Liaison supporting the effort.

# TargetX Product Spotlight: Developing a Texting Strategy



**In the higher ed world, we constantly have to adapt our communication strategies and tools to meet students where they are. Over the past few months, TargetX teams have been speaking with admissions counselors, advisors, faculty, administrators, but most importantly, students. Our conversations are focused on understanding the regular changes in their educational environment and how we can most effectively support them with TargetX products.**

During our conversations with students, we — unsurprisingly — discovered they prefer a quick text message over a phone call or email for their admissions and advising needs. A phone call might be warranted for longer or more serious issues, but in general, texts are the communication method of choice.

Understanding the student's needs and working with several of our clients in the design and testing, TargetX launched our newest tool, TX SMS!

One of our early adopters of TX SMS was the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Transfer Admissions Counselor at UWL, Amanda Lettner, utilizes the TargetX texting tool a lot with her transfer students noting that “the students are good at responding.” Additionally, she likes that she can create a report and modify the message and send it when it works best for her.

As Amanda and other early adopter users discovered, our new SMS tool allows you to send 1-1 and bulk messages to students while giving you total control of your messaging strategy – whether that's one big inbox for everyone or a phone number for each user. Some of the cool features include:

- 🗨 A dedicated number to send text messages – with the ability to add additional numbers, yourself, very quickly!
- 🗨 The integration with Twilio Messaging Services to build student relationships with secure, cross-channel conversations.
- 🗨 Customize opt-out / opt-in messages.
- 🗨 Organize your numbers into different “inboxes” with a many-to-many relationship between numbers, users and inboxes.
- 🗨 Within each inbox, you control who has access to send individual messages and bulk messages.

An essential step before setting up for TX SMS is developing a texting strategy, as this will make your initial setup and rollout to your internal teams much simpler.

The steps in this blog post will lay out a hypothetical example to demonstrate one potential strategy, but obviously, you can adapt this to suit your needs. At the end of these steps, you should have a good idea of how many inboxes you need in TX SMS and how many phone numbers you should purchase inside Twilio to power those inboxes.

**Starting with a texting strategy will be key to your institution's success in utilizing the new TX SMS tool!**

**To check out how the TX SMS tool works and looks, check out our latest Product Spotlight: TX SMS Demo. You can also visit the TargetX User Community “Knowledge Base” for a full overview of the product or contact your Client Success Manager. ■**

**1** First, identify any departments that need collective inboxes, where end-users will share responsibility for sending out and receiving messages. For TX University, we have decided that the only collective inbox will be a generic “Admissions Inbox” that will push out large scale admissions reminders that anyone can respond to as messages come in.

**2** Next, identify any individuals who need their own inbox for sending and receiving more personal messages. For TX University, we've decided that all 10 of our admissions counselors should have their own inboxes to really build that personal relationship with their prospects. We've also decided that our 5 academic counselors should have inboxes to communicate with current students who need assistance with course selection and the like.

**3** Now, determine how many phone numbers are required for each inbox:  
a. If this inbox will not be used for bulk messages, it only needs one number. None of our counselors will be using bulk messages in their individual inboxes at TX University.

b. If the inbox will be used for bulk, try to estimate the largest bulk message you'll need to send this term. For our case, TX University generally has 6,000 applications per term, and at one point in the cycle, we want to push out a “Thank you for applying” message. As the maximum recommended messages per phone number per day are 250, we'll want to divide our biggest message volume by that, which gives us 24. So in this inbox, we'll want at minimum 24 phone numbers, plus a buffer to account for imperfect distribution, so let's round up to 30 numbers.

**4** For TX University, then, we'll need a messaging service with 30 phone numbers in the sender pool and 15 services, all with one phone number each in the sending pool.



Achieving the Dream

## DREAM 2021

# Addressing Racial Equity & Culturally Responsive Learning Experiences

– or, in some cases, don't have the funds for Wi-Fi access or a computer. As I reflected on former students – I felt I failed those students who needed our support the most, even though I tried every avenue to reach out and help.

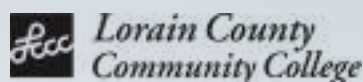
This past year has challenged faculty, staff and administrators to think differently. To be strategic in the planning process in all operations of the college. To think out-of-the-box in providing culturally responsive learning experiences. But more than anything else, the past year has pushed us to address racial equity in higher education. This year's Achieving the Dream Conference supported those initiatives – providing resources for not just two-year institutions worldwide but higher education partners, like Target X, who are part of the Liaison International family.

The DREAM 2021 Conference focused its virtual conference around five core themes:

- Centering Racial Equity – Being intentional and action-oriented in removing racial inequities that impede social justice.
- Anchoring a Bold, New Access Agenda – Creating on-ramps for adult learners, disconnected youth and unique populations to achieve socioeconomic mobility in the communities the college serves.
- Leveraging Our Localness – Developing innovative partnerships that build thriving and equitable communities.
- Listening in New Ways in the Age of Big Data – Embedding resilience, sensemaking and agility into the culture of our institutions and radically moving the student voice into the middle of redesign.
- Fostering Teaching and Learning Excellence – Creating new opportunities for professional development and leveraging evidence-based practices that support student learning.

**“Failure is not bad. Failure paves the way for everything you can achieve in your life.”**

Nikita Johnson  
*Achieving the Dream DREAM Scholar*



**“Listen to your students. Listen to that voice that may just be a whisper but wants to scream.”**

Estefany Palencia  
*Achieving the Dream DREAM Scholar*



Throughout the virtual conference, attendees learned how to address racial equity and create culturally responsive learning experiences. We heard from two-year institutions across the country that developed programs and initiatives to tackle issues inside and outside the classroom. TargetX, a Silver Sponsor of the event, sponsored a concurrent session by Sinclair Community College – a recent winner of the Achieving the Dream Leader College Distinction Status, the highest designation offered to institutions.

In the concurrent session, *Planting the Seeds: Growing Our Own to Remove Racial Inequities for Faculty and Students*, the presenters, comprised of mostly faculty, discussed three programs at Sinclair that have made racial equity central to faculty recruitment and student success. One of the programs, *The Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation*, assists colleges in efforts to increase underrepresented minority student recruitment, retention, persistence and attainment in STEM programs. Ultimately, the program supports students by providing financial stipends to attend activities and tasks associated with making them successful.

One of the best virtual higher ed conferences I've attended in the past year was filled with nationally renowned speakers, like Dr. David Truer. Truer, a Pushcart Prize Winner, *New York Times* best-selling author and Professor of English at the University of Southern California, provided his reflection on imagining and making Native futures. As an Ojibwe Indian from Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota, Truer shared his parents' story through an inspiring yet eye-opening discussion on the need for inclusion in education – especially within a diverse faculty perspective. Truer stated, “I've never had, at any level, a Native teacher...”

**To learn more about TargetX and our Community College Suite, visit our dedicated Community College site today! ■**

Still, education is something being done to us, not being done for us.”

The three-day event opened my eyes not just as a faculty member but in a way that encourages me to push forward the Community College mission and vision. Community Colleges continue to play an important role in breaking the barriers to student access and success. At TargetX, my colleagues and I are committed to helping not just our clients but all of higher education in developing **equity-minded, inclusive and culturally responsive Recruitment and Student Success** initiatives – no matter the student.

To support higher education institutions, especially Community Colleges, in early 2020, TargetX launched the Community College Suite. This one-of-a-kind CRM focuses on the uniqueness of Community Colleges and allows institutions to ensure **every** student has the opportunity to receive an education – and assuring **every** student is a success.



It is TargetX's goal to help two-year institutions achieve the mission and vision of Community Colleges across the country. As Dr. Karen Stout, President & CEO at Achieving the Dream, stated of Community Colleges, “We have a responsibility to effect change in a meaningful way – in our classrooms, on our campuses and in the communities we serve.” TargetX and the entire Liaison family are here to help make that change possible.

As I was trying to reflect on this year's Achieving the Dream, DREAM 2021 Conference, I paused.

I stared at the snow falling.

I paused some more.

Then I drifted into a reflection of the words of several DREAM Scholars.

Nikita's and Estefany's words struck me the most. As an Adjunct Professor at two very different Community Colleges, I see the “Estefanys” in my classroom. I hear their whispers.

I see the “Nikitas” entering my virtual classroom focused on taking past failures to achieve new goals. I see them working hard and overcoming obstacles few people ever have to experience.

Sadly, I've also seen students who “gave up” – or who didn't have the support network outside of the classroom



LIAISON

by Benjamin Boivin  
Senior Copywriter

## For the first time since 1986, vinyl is outselling CDs. So what does that have to do with Gen Z students and the power of personalized print?

### History repeats itself.

In 2020, vinyl had its best sales week in history when over 1.8 million vinyl albums were sold in the seven days leading up to Christmas. Vinyl has made a remarkable resurgence over the past decade after nearly being a dead industry at the turn of the millenium.

While streaming services account for 85% of total music industry revenue, people increasingly want a multichannel listening experience. Apple Music, CDs, cassettes, Spotify, XM Radio, vinyl and YouTube are just some of the options. Just because somebody buys The Beatles' Abbey Road vinyl (the best-selling vinyl of the past decade) doesn't mean they disregard the exact same content through their Spotify account. Enjoying one medium does not devalue another.

Higher education should take a page from the music industry and the Generation Z listening experience.

### While vinyl is back in the news, here are some things vinyl is NOT.

- ✗ Vinyl is not convenient.
- ✗ Vinyl is not cost-effective.
- ✗ Vinyl is not digital.
- ✗ Vinyl is not a space-saving item.
- ✗ Vinyl is not a better-quality sound (this one is debatable).

Like vinyl, traditional print collateral in higher education marketing lost popularity as the Internet became stronger and faster. So why in 2021 does Generation Z flock to record stores? Why are record players in high demand? And why does your institution need to start sending home print again?

Because it's different.

### Smartphone fatigue.

One of the main characteristics of Gen Z is they were born with smartphones in their hands. This tech-savvy digital generation grew up with tiny MP3 players in their pocket holding far more songs than any clunky jukebox. (Keep in mind, an incoming first-year college student in Fall 2021 was born between 2003 and 2004, when "That's What I Call Music!" was already in double-digit volumes.)

Convenience can get boring after a while. Particularly during the isolating, socially distanced pandemic. How many emails or text messages can a student read on their smartphone? To break through the digital clutter, print collateral returned to save the day. Gen Z students are expert swipers of the glass screen, but they really appreciate flipping through pages as their parents did way back in the 1990s. The smell of paper. The weight of the brochure. The art on the front cover. The university logo and campus imagery are all a part of the experience. And unlike an email that can simply be deleted, print makes it inside the front door and onto the kitchen table for all to see.

### Yes, tangible technology is unique to Generation Z, but consider the appeal of music streaming services and smartphones:

- ✓ They are convenient.
- ✓ They are cost-effective.
- ✓ They go with you everywhere.
- ✓ They give you the ability to share your interests with friends and groups.
- ✓ They allow you to personalize your college search and music listening experience.

Unlike the radio, streaming services allow people to curate a personally exclusive listening experience. Streaming services employ advanced algorithms to pick up on user preferences and suggest relevant music. Spotify even offers a "Weekly Mix" playlist based on artists they think the listener might like. Liaison also tracks student engagement and uses it for marketing purposes through our powerful Enrollment Marketing Platform (EMP).

### Bridging the generation gap.

The differences between vinyl and streaming services are the differences between print and email marketing. So, what if you could take the tangible, artistically driven characteristics of variable print and add the personalized power of unique user interfaces? You can with EMP's personalized print campaigns.

Generation Z is far too advanced to only rely on one medium. They want email, text, digital ads, in-person, phone calls, Zoom meetings, virtual tours and, you guessed it, print. Just like their music listening experience, they also prefer their college marketing coming from all directions.

A high school senior in 2021 has likely received hundreds, if not thousands, of college-branded emails by the time they apply to college. They are desensitized to emails by the time acceptance letters are sent out, therefore, if your institution is only sending acceptance letters via email, you are making a mistake.

Just ask Dr. Christopher Smith, Executive Director of Enrollment Management at Kansas State University Polytechnic and EMP user. After adding personalized print to their new omnichannel marketing campaigns, Kansas State Poly experienced a yield rate increase of 21% over two cycles! Our research shows that when coupled with personalized print, email open rates increase by as much as 37% and click-through rates jump up 14%.

### Create lasting memories with a physical medium.

Remember the feeling after purchasing your favorite artist's new album? That is what it feels like when a student receives their first acceptance packet in the mail. They may hang it on the fridge. They may frame it and present it in the living room. But they will remember that feeling forever. There is a reason college diplomas and financial aid awards are not emailed. For the most essential things in life, paper still rules.

Ask a college senior what they remember about their enrollment process and they may draw a blank. Ask them if they remember their first acceptance letter, and you're sure to see a smile. YouTube videos of students opening their mail to receive the good news go viral all the time. And now more than ever, students want their good news on paper, not on screen. Personalized print is more than just another marketing channel; it's a souvenir, a symbol, a prize, an experience, a memory.

If you would like to speak to a Liaison EMP representative about the best-selling album of all time (Michael Jackson's *Thriller* at 66 million copies worldwide), you need to contact Sean Fitzgerald (he ran an MJ fan club in the 80's). Or, if you want to discuss the power of personalized print and how it can make a difference in your enrollment yield, Sean and his team are ready to rock and roll. ■





# Pandemic Year in Review:

## An Interview With EMP's Remote Interns

### REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE: COLLEGES TALK ABOUT IT. STUDENTS EXPECT IT. EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR IT ON RESUMES.

College juniors and seniors most commonly get real-world experience through hands-on, in-person internships. So, what does real-world experience look like during a global “new normal”? Glassdoor estimated that half of the internships in the U.S. were canceled in the spring of 2020, and internship hiring on Glassdoor for April of that year fell 39% compared to April 2019. A recent *Forbes* article described how “a casualty of campus shutdowns was the college internship, long regarded as one of the most beneficial forms of student engagement, valued as a high-impact experience that immerses students in environments where they learn and practice the crucial soft skills of employability.”

#### Adapting to Change At the EMP Office

Collaboration is essential to any creative team. Marketing campaign brainstorming sessions, content strategy planning and brand-guided design meetings were daily occurrences in our Poughkeepsie office before New York’s shelter-from-home order was announced in March 2020. As a tech-savvy team of marketers, programmers, designers, writers and client success managers, our entire office pivoted to a work-from-home format immediately. While thousands of businesses lost their ability to utilize interns, Liaison’s EMP team continued our internship program across multiple departments and developed a new communication method between employees at all levels.

Internship programs present a mutually beneficial proposition to both industry professionals and the students they train. As a higher education marketing and tech firm, high school and college-age students are not just our primary target audience, they are also vital in our decision-making process and market testing. Interns support our creative efforts, provide invaluable insight and directly relate to the audience we interact with most, Generation Z. In March 2020, halfway through the spring internship, our office went dark as laptop screens lit up from home. The Spring 2020 interns had to learn to adapt to remote work and learning overnight, and since that time, we have hired nearly a dozen more interns from around the Empire State.

### Remote Internships: The Student Perspective

We sat down with three of our recent copywriting and content strategy interns to hear about their experiences during the last year.

*What have you learned about remote work? What differences have you noticed compared to in-office work? What are the benefits and/or disadvantages?*

#### Riannon Varney, Spring 2020:

Interning from home has helped me keep a daily routine and has provided me with new skills that will be needed in the workforce after this pandemic. I look forward to working every week and seeing what has changed in not only the higher education industry but the marketing industry as a whole. Yet, I have faced many new challenges I would not have dealt with in the office. For example, sharing “office space”, or in my case, the dining room table, with my mom.

I have learned virtual call etiquette and different ways to communicate while not in the office, including Microsoft Teams and Skype. In past internships, I have only communicated with my colleagues through email. Companies will be looking for students who are accustomed to working remotely and those who built the skillset to transition back and forth. Moving forward, specifically in the near future, many conference calls and meetings will most likely take place virtually.

I now have a competitive edge over someone who’s never worked remotely before and may not be fully comfortable with the various platforms, skills or attention needed to perform and execute tasks.

#### Erica Gartelmann, Summer 2020:

Though my experience as a remote intern for Liaison has been untraditional, I have learned a ton about copywriting, developed my writing skills and gotten a sneak peek into the working world.

Remote work doesn’t allow for as much collaboration, which I think I disliked the most. I’m the type of person who likes to bounce ideas off of other people or have a good brainstorming session before I work on my own. Nevertheless, this experience challenged me to be more independently creative.

One benefit of working from home is that the commute to work is much shorter; however, because of this, there’s no distinction between your workspace and home. I enjoy going into an office

*(Continued on next page)*

**Pandemic Year in Review:**  
An Interview With EMP's Remote Interns

because seeing my coworkers and changing my surroundings helps my mind shift into a different mode. Overall, I think there are pros and cons for both working at home and in an office. In my ideal scenario, I think I would want a balance between the two.

**Sabrina Molinaro, Fall 2020:**

There were both good and bad things about working from home. The convenience, of course, was a huge plus. Waking up five minutes before I had to clock in was a very different experience from my last internship, which was a thirty-minute commute each way. I'm also not much of a morning person, so it was especially nice for me not to get up and get ready every morning.

That being said, I did miss being in an actual office and being around people. Once you sit in your dorm for three days straight, you start to miss the outside world, even if I would have had to wake up earlier to get there. Overall, I didn't mind working from home, but I definitely missed being in a work environment and getting to know the other people there.

**Looking on the bright side**

*What are you most grateful for despite the unpredictable end to senior year?*

**Riannon Varney, Spring 2020:**

I am most grateful for my internship despite the end of my senior year. I know a lot of people whose experiences were cut short because their jobs just could not be done remotely. It was such a relief to still have some sense of normalcy throughout this crazy time. Beyond just learning how to work remotely, it's given me an escape and something more important to focus on — especially because I didn't have an extreme workload from regular classes. I also have created new work habits that I don't think I would have made in the office.

**Erica Gartelmann, Summer 2020:**

I'm most grateful that my family and I are all healthy and safe. Sometimes I'll get a bit frustrated knowing that classes are online this fall again or that I had to celebrate my 21st birthday in quarantine, but at the end of the day, what really matters most to me is that my loved ones are okay during this pandemic.

In addition to that, I am immensely grateful that Liaison offered me the opportunity to be a remote intern this summer. Scrolling LinkedIn toward the end of May, I noticed how many of my

friends were losing their internships due to COVID-19. It made me realize how lucky I was to continue to gain professional experience during such an unprecedented time.

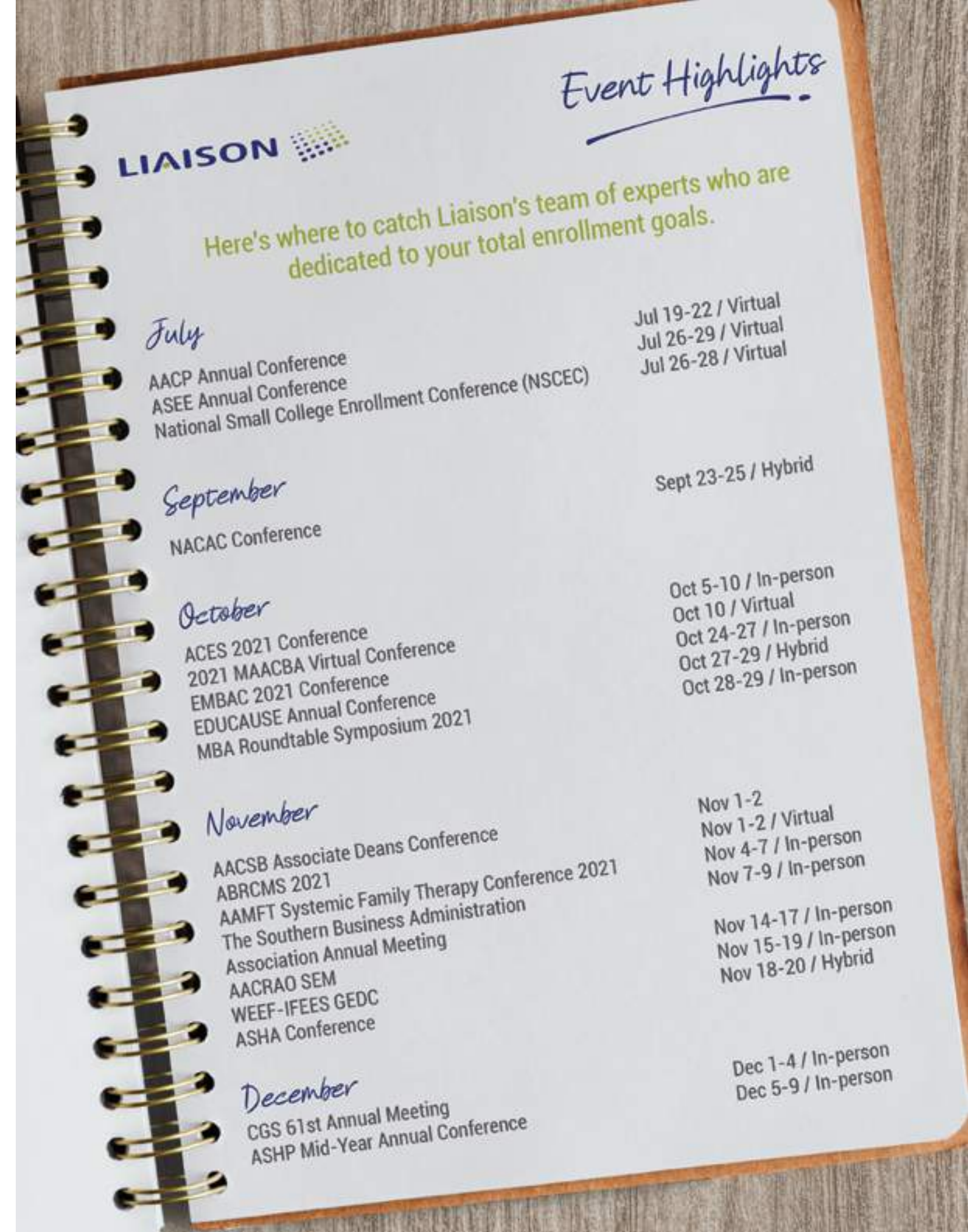
**Sabrina Molinaro, Fall 2020:**

This semester I took on two internships, which I would never have been able to do if I had my usual class schedule. I only felt comfortable doing this because I knew I would have so much extra time on my hands, so the added benefit of this unpredictable year was using my downtime to get more experience. While this was often stressful, it taught me a lot about time management and prioritizing different areas of my life. Although it was difficult, I am grateful to have done it and wouldn't have been able to pull it off without the added element of everything being remote.

**Continuing to Learn and Evolve**

While there is an end in sight, we still have a long way to go before COVID-19 is a distant memory. As colleges and universities adapt to a constantly changing environment, it is paramount that internship coordinators across various industries do the same. Liaison's EMP team is fortunate to attract, hire and retain above-average talent from around the tri-state area. As we continue finding solutions to challenges caused by COVID-19, we reflect on the incredible work our interns put in every day.

To truly understand prospective college students, we need to learn from current ones. The combination of marketing professionals, higher education experts and current college students all working together to improve our clients' enrollment is what distinguishes EMP as one of the best in the business. Not every EMP intern transitions to a full-time employee, but each one of them leaves a lasting impact on the future of higher education marketing. ■



# REFOCUSING ON STUDENT SUCCESS

## FROM RECRUITING TO ENROLLMENT AND BEYOND

Today's students have come to expect a modern application experience that engages them with personalized messages and speedy replies. At the same time, admissions professionals understand the importance of using the right data and tools to create the most effective and holistic application and review processes possible.

To make sure those two sets of priorities are in alignment at all times, you need a proactive strategy based on helping best-fit students find your school.

### START AT THE TOP

"To expand the top of your funnel, start doing targeted advertising that attracts the right students before they even start looking for you," said Liaison Client Delivery Manager Jillian Baer during a recent forum on student success.

"One way Liaison makes that possible is by creating websites — like [ExploreGradSchools.org](https://www.exploregradschools.org) and [ExploreHealthCareers.org](https://www.explorehealthcareers.org) — that attract applicants and guide them to our Centralized Application Service (CAS), where they can discover and apply to your program," Baer said. "Once students are engaged, we also provide Drive-to-Apply and Drive-to-Complete campaigns. When I worked in admissions, we would have given anything to have a partner in recruiting who was setting up campaigns to increase the top of our funnel. That would have been a game changer."

Other types of targeted campaigns focus on "abandoned applications" and financial aid awards, for example. Some institutions also choose to send out personalized print mailings to students and parents as part of their recruitment campaigns.

"With on-demand printing, you print only what's needed," Baer said. "You can actually print custom content for every student and parent using the data they provide. It really makes a big impact when somebody's looking at a dozen different generic postcards and then they see something that's personalized for them."

According to Baer, Cazenovia College, in New York State, worked with Liaison to achieve a 35% reduction in print costs while still increasing outreach.

"We were able to save them money while still meeting all of their goals," Baer said. "In fact, Cazenovia surpassed its enrollment goals in 2019. Their strategy focused, in large part, on parent outreach and underclass outreach via omnichannel communication strategies, including texting, emails and print."

### HOLISTIC REVIEWS

Liaison's SlideRoom — a portfolio management system that allows for more holistic views of students — is another tool schools can use to support applicants during their journey. SlideRoom is the only portfolio management system endorsed by the Common App.

"SlideRoom is currently used by every single Ivy League school," Baer said. "SlideRoom currently processes over three million media items annually — everything from audio files to video files to portfolios for artwork and explanations of writing samples."

"My favorite fun fact about SlideRoom is that it's used by the Space Telescope Science Institute, which is a division of NASA. So, essentially, if you want to use the Hubble Space Telescope for research, you use SlideRoom to apply for that time. I definitely encourage you to check out [slideroom.com](https://www.slideroom.com) to learn about all the schools that use it and how it works."

**"You can actually print custom content for every student and parent using the data they provide. It really makes a big impact when somebody's looking at a dozen different generic postcards and then they see something that's personalized for them."**

Speaking of the Common App, Baer pointed out that its [special application designed specifically for transfer students](#) also expands your pipeline by putting more non-traditional students into the funnel. Powered by Liaison, it's now used by all 641 Common App member institutions.

Baer also noted that it's now more important than ever for institutions to evaluate all the data at their disposal in order to plan more effectively for the future. She believes that two recent Liaison acquisitions make that job significantly easier: [Othot](#), by providing predictive and prescriptive data analytics, and [TargetX](#), by facilitating student success and retention initiatives.

"You need to make sure that all of your different tactics and strategies are working side-by-side, complementing one another versus competing against each other," Baer said. "Whatever your recruitment and enrollment goals are, Liaison can help." ■

# AT MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE, GRADCAS “IS THE SOLUTION THAT MET ALL REQUIREMENTS”

Application volume and enrollment numbers have increased significantly since MSU joined the GradCAS Community.

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Associate Provost and Dean of the Missouri State University Graduate College, was no stranger to Liaison’s Centralized Application Service (CAS) when she signed her institution up to be an early adopter of GradCAS in 2017. That’s because GradCAS — the CAS designed specifically for graduate programs with no national affinities or professional associations — has a lot in common with other Liaison CASs Dr. Masterson had already used, such as CSDCAS for communication science & disorders programs and CASPA for physician assistants.

“I am thrilled,” she said. “Our degree offerings in GradCAS carry the Missouri State brand while at the same time allowing each individual graduate program to create messaging that builds widespread awareness of their strengths and unique benefits. With GradCAS, we can efficiently use admissions criteria and decision-making processes that fill seats with best-fit students. Finally, national-level data will help support our graduate enrollment management goals.”

Masterson says Missouri State uses Enrollment Marketing by Liaison in tandem with its CASs in order to implement more effective marketing campaigns.



Julie Masterson, Ph.D.  
Associate Provost and Dean



*“We can export data from a CAS into Enrollment Marketing by Liaison, and then use that powerful platform to create different types of messaging for different groups of students, using everything from email to text to voicemail messages. Then we’re able to track the results of those outreach efforts to gauge their effectiveness.”*

“Among all CASs used by Missouri State, applications are up 71% compared to the previous cycle, and enrollment is up 12%.”

This combination has yielded impressive results in the past year alone. Among all CASs used by Missouri State, applications are up 71% compared to the previous cycle, and enrollment is up 12%. The growth in enrollment was due to increases in graduate programs across campus that had unfilled capacity.

## Checking All the Boxes

Masterson said there were three main reasons why she chose GradCAS:

- ✓ **Configurability**, specifically the ability to tailor applications to individual programs.
- ✓ **Affordability**, as the CAS is available at no cost to the university.
- ✓ **Technical simplicity**, as GradCAS requires minimal ongoing IT support.

“GradCAS was the solution that met all those requirements,” she said.

From the outset, Masterson was eager to use GradCAS to increase diversity in Missouri State’s graduate programs.

“We live in an area with very limited racial and ethnic diversity,” she explained. “It’s challenging to recruit students to come and stay here. We’ve really devoted a

lot of university resources — time, effort and brainpower — into trying to do something about this, as it’s critical for all of our students to be exposed to diversity for an optimal education.”

“This is where GradCAS and Enrollment Marketing by Liaison really help. They let us highlight the fact that we provide quality education at an affordable price. We can expand the reach of that message and spread the word that we offer a lot of options regarding delivery formats to increase access. With GradCAS, our admissions processes are working together — our recruiting is better, we’re in new markets and we have a better application process. We hope that increases applications from underrepresented students.”

## Application Preparation

In addition, Dr. Masterson said familiarizing undergrads with GradCAS before they graduate also may draw more students to her institution’s programs.

“One of the things I really appreciate about Liaison’s CASs 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.” ■



If you’re interested in learning more about how GradCAS can make an immediate impact at your institution, connect with Managing Director Judy Chappellear today.



# PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES: Using Email to Create a More Authentic Presence With Students

As Senior Copywriter at Liaison's EMP Division and a former college admissions professional, Benjamin Boivin has a unique perspective on the challenges — and rewards — associated with crafting messages that resonate with students and drive them to apply and enroll.

He recently spoke with *Modern Enrollment* about his presentation at the 2021 Virtual Liaison User Conference, “**Best Practices in Email Communication: Data-Driven Insights to Enhance Email Marketing.**”

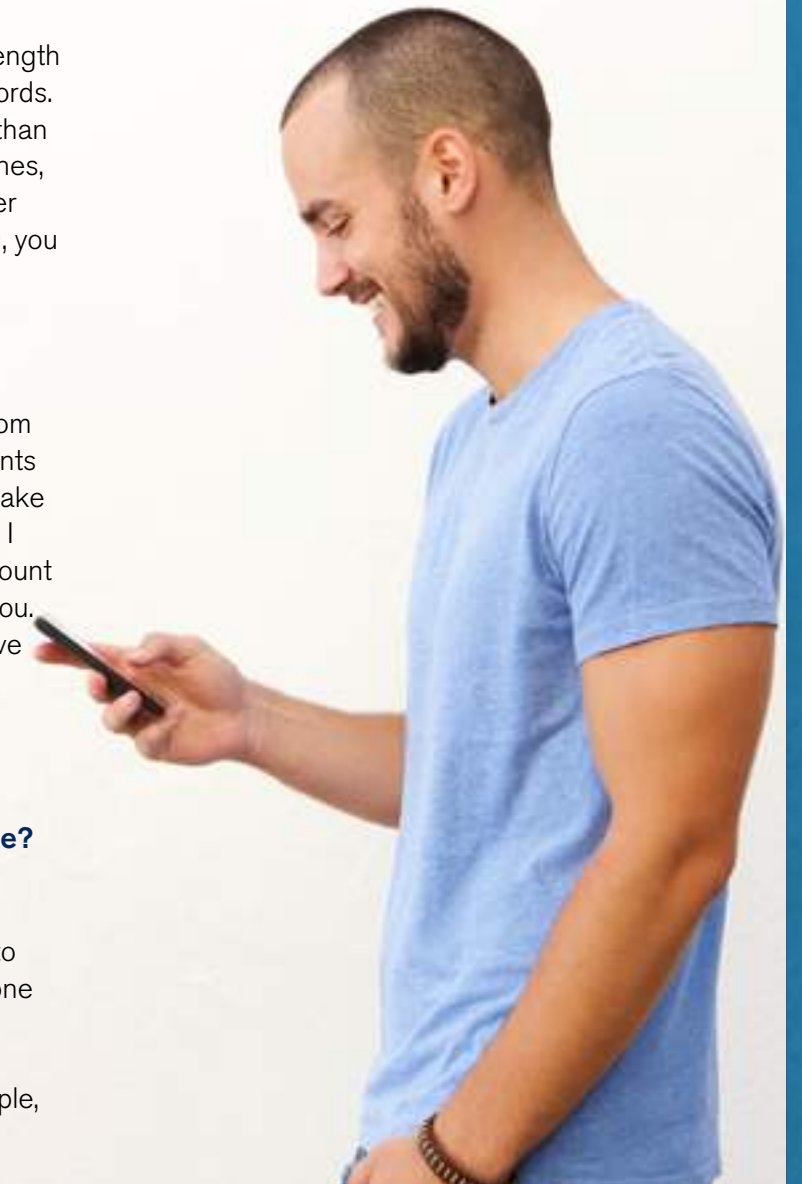
**Modern Enrollment (ME):** You believe that the key to creating effective email campaigns starts with getting the details right. Could you please elaborate?

**Ben Boivin (BB):** Having the right subject line length is very important. The ideal subject line length is only 39 characters or about seven or eight words. In reality, though, most subject lines are longer than that. But most students read email on their phones, and most phones cut off email subject lines after 40 characters. So if your subject line is too long, you won't get your message across.

It's also important to think about the placement of the “call to action” button in your emails. The inclination may be to put that button at the bottom so you can close with a call to action. But students may not read the whole thing, so you need to make sure you place it at the top of the email instead. I challenge people to go into their own email account and open 20 emails about things that interest you. You'll often find the call to action before you have to scroll down. That really opened my eyes.

**ME:** You warn against inadvertently using outdated language because it can be counterproductive. Can you give an example?

**BB:** With hyperlinks, for example, you want to avoid saying “click here.” That seems outdated to a student who's reading something on their phone and touching, tapping or pressing the screen. Students know how to touch their phones. You can say “go here” or “learn more here” for example, instead of saying “click here.”



(Continued on next page)

**ME:** What else is key to an effective email campaign?

**BB:** Personalization is an incredibly important part of email marketing. Think about how many generic emails you get every day. It's nice to get one that makes you say, "Oh wow, this person knows who I am. They're calling me by my name." That means a lot to people. At EMP, we can even ask students for their preferred names so that we're NOT calling them by a name they don't like.

We also have a lot of data about the best time to send emails. We know emails sent at 10 a.m. have the highest open rates. Other good times include 8 p.m. ("the sleepy email"), 6 a.m. ("the wakeup email") and 2 p.m. ("the distraction email"). Tuesday is the best day of the week to send emails, by far.



**ME:** Some people love emojis, some people don't. Do they have a place in higher-ed email marketing campaigns, and what does that tell us about the future of enrollment marketing?

**BB:** Emojis are popular but you've got to know your audience. Emojis in your subject line may increase your open rate in some cases, but you don't want to use them for everything. If you're talking to a student looking for a doctoral program, they're probably a very serious student. You don't necessarily want to lighten up such an important step in the process.

Generally speaking, the way we do things on campus is changing and that has to be integrated into your emails. Incoming students want a kind of experience — a digital journey — that we really didn't think about 10, 15, 20 years ago. In the next five years, schools that are not trying to update their virtual presence are going to look very outdated. For the amount of money tuition costs, it's important to make sure students feel they're getting the best bang for their buck.

If everything that you write in your emails incorporates the elements of "C.U.R.V.E." — curiosity, urgency, relevancy, value and emotion — you're going to end up getting higher clickthrough rates and higher open rates and you're going to have a more authentic presence with students. ■



# GETTING PERSONAL

## — AND GETTING RESULTS —

AT

# KANSAS STATE POLYTECHNIC

He had no way of knowing at the time, but the decision to start working with Liaison a few years ago ultimately helped make it possible for Dr. Christopher A. Smith, Executive Director of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Financial Aid at Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus, to weather the Coronavirus with relative ease. His institution not only avoided significant disruption during the darkest days of the pandemic but today, some of its programs, including the professional pilot program, are filled to capacity.

According to Dr. Smith, that success is directly attributable to his communication initiatives with students and parents, which rely heavily on Liaison's Enrollment Marketing Platform (EMP™) to deliver highly personalized print pieces throughout the recruitment process.

In particular, he said, his decision to start targeting freshmen and sophomore high school students and parents with customized print mailings is now starting to pay dividends.

"I know it's working because we have parents who bring their high school seniors to visit and they still have the parents' piece we sent in their sophomore year. Very few institutions are doing this. So many are ignoring the parents altogether, and that is a huge mistake."

### "Like reading what I wanted to do"

"Parents, especially Gen Z parents and the group coming up behind them, want to be heavily involved," Smith said. "So you can say to them, 'You need to back up and let them grow up. Let them do this.' Or you can embrace it. People want to be acknowledged. We began doing this early in the process with a multichannel approach, and EMP is an intricate part of that. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it."

The personalized print pieces resonate with students as well as parents. Dr. Smith recalled speaking with a new student in the professional pilot program who had received a print piece as a high school sophomore. He asked the student why he chose Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus over the other schools that had accepted him.

"He said, 'You pay attention to detail. In everything that was addressed to me, the information was about me and my interests. It wasn't about everything else. It was like reading what I wanted to do.'"

### Planning ahead together

Dr. Smith added, "You have to bring the personal experience into everything you do, and Liaison allows you to do it throughout the entire creative process. Thanks to the print pieces we sent after COVID became a reality, our prospective students never missed a beat. I had the technology and the systems in place I needed. And students appreciated it. When they get an admitted poster or a pair of Kansas State Polytechnic program-specific socks in the mail, it just makes their day."

Looking back on the past three years, Dr. Smith is glad he made the decision to partner with Liaison in general and EMP in particular. He encourages others to do the same.

"Start preparing now. Pick partners who will be there for you not only in the good times, but in the bad times," he said. "That's very, very important. There's always an opportunity to change what you're doing. You can either watch the parade from the sidelines, complain and wave — or you can get in it and walk down the road. You might hit some potholes or step in a puddle, but at least you'll be moving in the right direction. You cannot change the direction of your life if you just sit there. Because trust me, it will pass you by and you'll be doing something else for a living." ■

