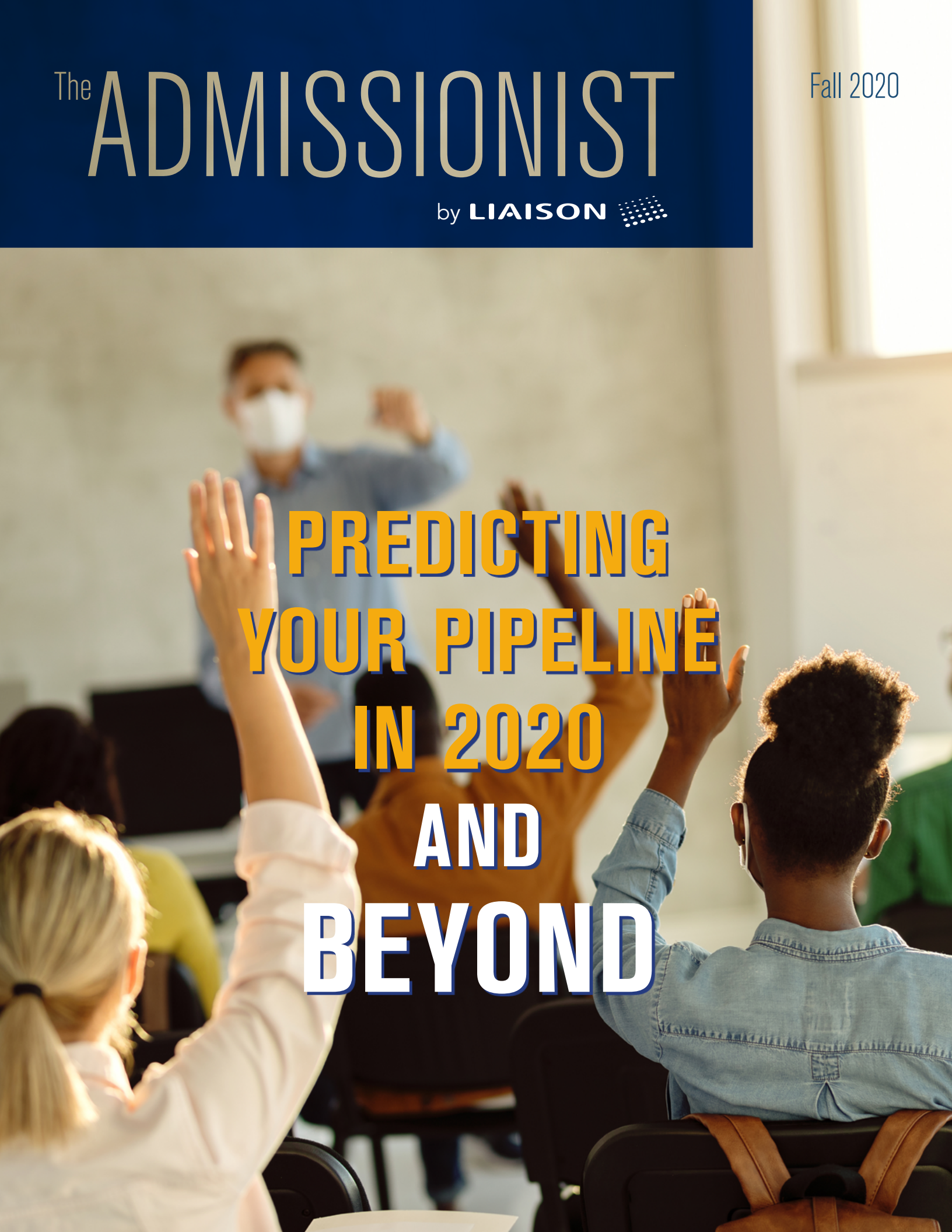


The **ADMISSIONIST**

Fall 2020

by **LIAISON** 



**PREDICTING  
YOUR PIPELINE  
IN 2020  
AND  
BEYOND**

# Envisioning a Brighter Future — and a Predictable Pipeline

Fall is finally here, but we are still no closer to viewing the future of higher education with any comforting degree of certainty.

However, I strongly believe that the uncertainty of today has the potential to create new opportunities to reimagine, reinvent and reinvigorate higher education for decades to come.

Although it remains impossible to predict the future, many of the challenges awaiting us in the months and years ahead have been clearly identified. For example, a survey sponsored by Liaison and published by Inside Higher Ed revealed that 89% of college and university presidents are worried about the overall financial stability of their institutions; 88% are concerned about enrollment declines. Numerous other studies have documented the fact that many students and potential applicants are now second-guessing their college plans as a result of the pandemic. Parents across the country share their concerns as well.

History reminds us, though, that college applications have recovered and increased in the wake of other major financial and social crises, such as the bursting of the “dot-com bubble” in 2000 and the implosion of global financial markets in 2008.

With that in mind, I believe a similar trend may become apparent in fields such as those in the health professions, fueled by students’ desire to train as nurses, epidemiologists and other health and science professionals to work on the front lines of this crisis or the next one.

My belief — shared by many of the campus leaders and presidents of professional associations I speak with regularly — is that the next decade will see a significantly greater investment into health care. Institutions that educate nurses, biomedical scientists and behavioral health specialists, among others, are likely to thrive in this environment as long as they can meet the needs of today’s applicants.

As you look to the future, I encourage you to remember that Liaison has been helping institutions achieve their most important admissions goals since I founded the company in 1990. We can help you, too.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *The Admissionist*. The interview with Harvard University’s Anthony Jack, Ph.D., about the relationship between cultural capital and the success of low-income students is a must read for everyone who works in higher education. Additional articles feature a case study of Baylor University’s successful CAS integration initiative; insights on applying to business school during the pandemic and how graduate education serves the public good. Of course, this issue also highlights Liaison’s other highly regarded solutions and services designed to improve your class-building efforts, including EMP™, SlideRoom™ and TargetX™.

Best,



*George*

**George Haddad**  
Founder and CEO

**LIAISON**

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

# 3 Tips to Help Your Prospective Health Care Students Get the Most Out of Health Professions Week

by Mandy Nau  
Executive Director



Mark your calendar now, because Health Professions Week 2020 (HPW2020) is the year's best opportunity for health professions associations to promote their fields — and for admissions officers to connect prospective students to reliable health care career resources.

Taking place virtually from Saturday, November 14 through Thursday, November 19, HPW2020 is a nationwide collaboration between health care and education organizations designed to provide authoritative, accessible resources to explore careers in the health professions. If you work with students considering a future in health care, HPW2020 is their one-stop-shop to learn more about the opportunities and requirements associated with 20 different career options, ranging from Anesthesiologist Assistant to Veterinary Medicine.

This year's event features virtual tours, live chats, interactive experiences and on-demand content. Share these three tips with your prospective students to ensure they get the most out of participating:

## Make a Plan to Fit Your Schedule.

Attendees can customize their HPW2020 experience to fit their schedules and their interests. Focus only on those events that are relevant to potential career paths, or explore new disciplines. Sit in on just a few sessions, join a selection of interactive events or participate all week long. [The full calendar and list of participating associations](#) are available now.

## Prepare Your Questions in Advance.

HPW2020 provides an opportunity to connect with current health care providers and students in a variety of fields. Attendees should prepare a list of questions that they'd like answered beforehand so they can use this virtual face-to-face time wisely.

## Register Now!

Not only should your prospects [register for Health Professions Week 2020 today](#) so that they don't miss the exciting reminders leading up to the November event, but you should register as well to help spread the word! We'd also appreciate if you tweet, share, like and engage with our posts on social media ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#)). Thank you for all that you do to help build better pipelines for the health professions in 2021 and beyond! ■



# MASTERING ADMISSIONS MARKETING

## FOUR WAYS TO BUILD A BETTER APPLICANT PIPELINE



The truth hurts, but it can't be ignored: With higher education losing its lustre in the eyes of many Americans, the job of filling your institution's pipeline with best-fit students is unlikely to get easier anytime soon — unless you embrace new ways of marketing your school.

Consider the facts: According to one recent survey of 2,000 students, graduates and parents, more than half (52%) said they think higher education is “misguided” and only 33% said they believe a college degree is a prerequisite for joining the middle class. Even fewer (27%) said a degree was needed to achieve the American dream.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, by becoming a member of Liaison's Centralized Application Service (CAS) Community, you can transform your marketing presence by increasing your programs' exposure, leveraging outsourced marketing expertise and visualizing trends to expand your applicant pool.

CAS is a cloud-based recruiting and admissions solution for higher education institutions, programs and associations looking to grow and shape enrollment while reducing overall effort and costs. CAS is a full service, web-based marketing and application platform that allows students to apply to as many programs at as many participating institutions as they'd like by submitting only a single set of application materials.

“We more than doubled our number of spring starts over previous years, with no additional marketing. As for applications in progress, we easily have ten times the number we usually have by now. CAS has enhanced visibility and interest in our program — the numbers are unbelievable.”

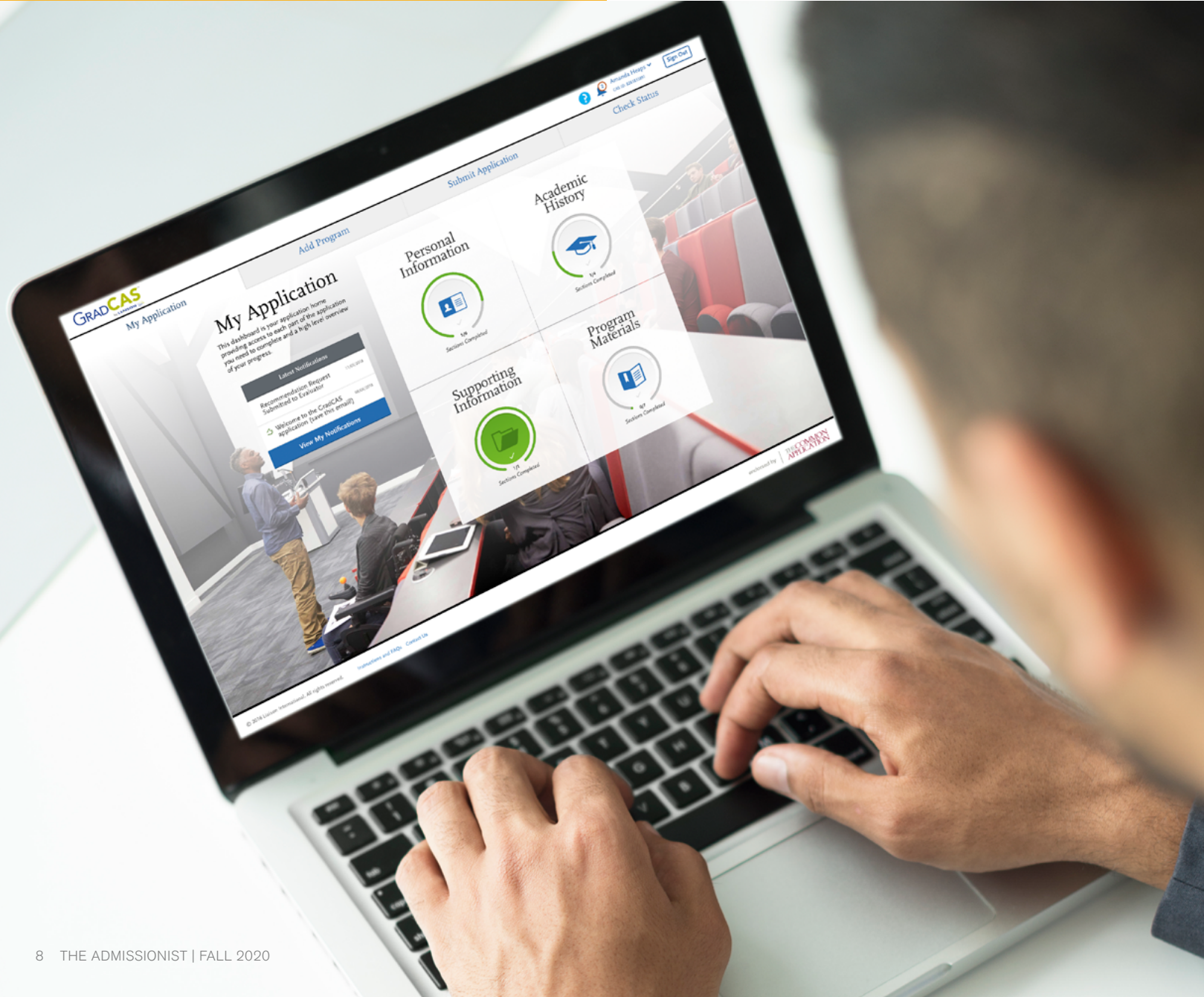


**Carsi Hughes, Ph.D.**  
Director of Postbaccalaureate  
Premedical Programs



Each discipline-specific CAS instantly expands an institution's marketing presence by featuring it within a community of programs that attract the same type of students you want to attract and enroll. By enabling schools to cast a wider marketing net, a CAS can help your applicant pool grow and diversify — with no additional marketing spend.

CAS is provided by Liaison, the leader in application management for higher education. Liaison has powered CASs for nearly three decades and currently serves over 31,000 programs at more than 1,000 colleges and universities. Read on for four ways CAS will help you build better pipelines.



## 1 Inclusion in a Global Directory of Programs Like Yours

With CAS, your fully branded program pages highlight your institution to potential applicants everywhere in the world. Even those who may not be familiar with your school at first can find it when searching for their programs of interest. In addition, CAS's streamlined application process engages prospects from their first interest, significantly reducing the potential for application abandonment.

Students come to CAS to explore their options. Get the attention of students who hadn't previously considered your institution by including it in the central directory of programs like yours.

### Reinforce your brand and showcase what makes your program unique

Prospective students applying to your school want to know more about you and what you have to offer. Why should they choose your program? Which students do you serve best? A CAS doesn't simply deliver a one-size-fits-all portal. Simple configuration tools allow you to reinforce your institutional brand with a home page that includes images and descriptions of your specific programs.

Brand, of course, isn't just about images. Program-specific admissions criteria are central to how you recruit high-quality, best-fit students that keep your brand strong. With a CAS, you can tailor questions, collect the sorts of documents you require or identify prerequisite courses. In addition, you can easily create program-specific scoring models.

### Market your school nationally

As part of a CAS Community, member programs have greater exposure to a larger application pool from across the country and even abroad. Programs often see a spike in applications after joining a CAS — and, more importantly, an accompanying rise in quality. For many disciplines, particularly in the health sciences, a CAS is where students go first to consider schools and programs.

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

“Despite the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, we've seen a 33% increase in applications for Fall 2020. For our Summer Online MBA alone, we saw a 180% increase in applications and a 163% increase in matriculants. Considering the additional revenue that we have already generated through the CAS, which was available to our institution at no cost, CAS is a smart business decision for data-driven, forward-thinking schools that are focused on investing in their students and programs.”



**Toby McChesney, Ed.D.**

Senior Assistant Dean of Graduate Business Programs and Special Assistant to the Provost





## 2 Access to Data With Applicant Trend Insights

The data-driven insights delivered by CAS help clearly identify which applicant groups are responding to your message and which groups you are missing. Those powerful analytics, in turn, allow you to reinvest resources in the messaging that gets the best possible return on investment.

### Access data in real-time

Having robust data management tools can help you deliver better results for your institution and for your applicants. CAS provides real-time, secure access to applicant information and the tools you need to understand, target and diversify specific applicant pools.

You can easily access the data you need to understand where your applicants are coming from or the profile of your admitted applicants — information that's critical for more accurate forecasting. CAS data facilitates the quick assessment of your progress toward diversity goals, international student applications and other strategic initiatives.

### Analyze your applicant pool to target best-fit applicants

CAS provides strategic tools for analyzing, evaluating and targeting best-fit applicants. You can analyze and report on applicant data more effectively, communicate with applicants from within the same portal and work with evaluators more efficiently to build the strongest possible incoming class. CAS also lets you analyze applicant pool data at a very granular level and apply sophisticated admissions criteria to your incoming class.

By understanding who your applicants are and where they're coming from, you can focus your marketing efforts on those students most likely to enroll and succeed. Standard reports, run either during the admissions cycle or after it, give you the empirical evidence you need to answer questions about program performance more quickly and confidently.

When it comes to admissions processes, too often, "best practices" remain rooted in outdated systems and outworn methods. As technology continues to expand and provide unprecedented opportunities for implementing targeted marketing initiatives, program staff must become more innovative about how they put their technology and data to work. CAS makes that possible.

"With CAS we're now able to use our own university logos and images in the application process, not only for the College but for each individual department. So when each prospective applicant applies, they're able to get more details for every department. It looks like they're applying to Texas A&M University, instead of just completing a generic application."



**Tandilyn Morrel**  
Director of Graduate Programs  
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
Engineering

## 3 Professional Drive-To-Apply Campaigns

Liaison's professional marketing team complements your existing marketing efforts, allowing you to take advantage of our expertise in campaign development and creative development.

For example, CAS Community membership comes with complimentary drive-to-apply and drive-to-complete campaigns, facilitated by our team of expert recruitment and enrollment marketers.

Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE) partnered with Liaison to develop a holistic campaign strategy with multiple touchpoints across each stage of their funnel. Search campaigns, event promotions and drive-to-apply campaigns leveraged data on each student to deliver personalized communication across channels. Focusing on students' special interests, such as athletics or clubs, was instrumental in connecting with them.

"When we became more strategic in our partnership with Liaison, we saw impressive results," said Seandra Mitchell, MSOE's Dean of Admissions. "Internally, we worked with athletics and student life to identify high-level buckets based on whether a student says they're interested in club sports, playing a musical instrument or things like that. Then, we worked with the Liaison team to plan ways to promote MSOE to students based on their interests. In 2018, we exceeded our enrollment goal for traditional freshmen by 7.1%. We have a leadership team that couldn't be happier!"

## 4 Social Media and International Advertising Campaigns

Each unique CAS attracts applicants' attention through highly targeted, far-reaching ads on social media channels and international outlets, including StudyPortals, the *Financial Times*, Princeton Review and *U.S. News & World Report*.

With CAS, you can also use your own data and data pooled from CAS member schools and programs to benchmark against your peers — regionally and nationally. You'll be able to see how well your message is being received and work with Liaison to create more informed marketing plans for improving outreach and yield.

These are just four reasons that 31,000 programs are members of Liaison's CAS Community. Contact Liaison today to learn more about how joining can help you reach more applicants and build a better class. ■

"A big part of our strategy involves taking a very personalized approach to communicating with students, making sure that we focus on their individual needs, motivations and concerns. Liaison understands that. I was very intrigued by Liaison's personalized approach to focusing on individual students. There is nobody else doing what Liaison is doing right now in terms of their partnerships and marketing pieces. Working with Liaison is like having a combined enrollment and marketing department."



**Dr. Christopher A. Smith, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director of  
Enrollment Management, Marketing and  
Financial Aid

**KANSAS STATE**  
POLYTECHNIC

# SUCCESSING WITHOUT ALL OF THE ANSWERS

by Sasha Petersor  
CEO



Years ago, I started talking to my colleagues who work on college campuses across the country to ask them what's working and what's not. Immediately I concluded two things: one, that there is no single silver bullet for the silos that emerge like blocks against progress, and two, that everyone I spoke to because of that, was finding it challenging to make a meaningful impact. There was one exception. A friend of mine I call Stacy. She managed to achieve meaningful change.

How? It started when she refused to take the job she was offered unless the president of the university committed to clearing the path for her to do what she needed to do — meaning cabinet-level discussions and true cross-departmental accountability.

Once she had that commitment (and accepted the job!), she got to work building relationships and consensus across campus. She didn't exactly know "the what" but she knew setting the table for change involved "the who." She mapped out the student journey at her university, which in my experience, is the only way to start making a real impact on student success. If you can't identify a student's journey, how can you anticipate their needs and when and where they're going to encounter problems?

Stacy implemented cross-functional groups using the relationships she had built to diagram how the institution operated. In business, process mapping often can reveal how small changes can lead to big results and this happened here. One small change she made — aligning financial aid and bursar hours and calendars — led directly to her blowing her retention goals out of the water in the first year.

The most meaningful impact this focus on "the who" had was reducing the attention on systems to support the what! It might seem counterintuitive for a software CEO to encourage people to slow roll deployment of software, but in this case the tools should be a distant second to the strategy.

Too many campuses chase a piece of software, or worse yet an algorithm, as the solution to student engagement and outcomes. Software is a wonderful addition to a campus and can drive meaningful changes to both the student experience while on campus, and the ultimate outcomes that the campus delivers. But, that addition should be to support the strategy derived by the people who need to execute it — and not be viewed as a crutch for the challenges that come from creating that strategy.

I've spent the last few years thinking about the right systems that can be deployed on college and university campuses to lift up the focus on student outcomes. We know how to advise at scale, we know how to give clear insights into at risk students and we know how to do this while powering the admissions funnel. But the change needs to start with conversations on campus, just like Stacy did.

There were other changes of course, and changes like that can have the "Jenga effect" of knocking down silos and clearing the way for other great things to happen. And that's what we at TargetX have always been excited about — transforming the way that colleges and universities support their prospects, students and alumni. Which is why I know that our joining the Liaison family is going to allow us to continue to be your catalyst to making every student a graduate and every graduate a success. ■



# GETTING BETTER DATA FASTER: HOW TEXAS A&M ACHIEVES KEY GOALS WITH ANALYTICS BY LIAISON™

by Tandilyn Morrel  
Director of Graduate Programs



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
Engineering



Texas A&M University College of Engineering joined EngineeringCAS™ in the fall of 2019 after looking for an application platform that offered an enhanced experience to our applicants. We also wanted to be able to provide our admissions staff, grad advisors and faculty the data they needed to make quicker and more strategic admission decisions in order to meet our enrollment goals. By joining EngineeringCAS — and by gaining access to Analytics by Liaison™ — we met those needs.

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

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

We also like the ability to download reports in a number of different file formats and import them into presentations. It makes it easy for us to share important data with other departments and individuals across campus. For example, we can see exactly which counties in Texas our applicants are coming from. That, in turn, allows us to streamline our recruiting resources and determine how to best use them in the future.

Another nice feature of Analytics by Liaison is that you're able to reach out to specific applicants, such as those who have not completed an application, and communicate with them directly. Prior to joining EngineeringCAS, we could not do that. We did not know who those applicants were. Now we can reach out to them directly, either to help them complete the application or to recruit them into the program.

Analytics also provides a very easy way to gather data for fulfilling state and national survey requests, compiling annual

reports and assisting with analyses of outcomes. And it's great for faculty because it allows them to quickly obtain important data about applicants, as well as data they need to apply for and retain grants.

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

In the short time we have been part of the EngineeringCAS community, we have seen a 5% increase in completed applications. I can say with confidence that Texas A&M is very pleased with the results we have achieved by joining EngineeringCAS and using Analytics to move forward in our admissions processes as we strategically build our cohorts. ■

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**PRIOR TO JOINING ENGINEERINGCAS AND USING ANALYTICS, WE HAD TO SUBMIT DATA REQUESTS TO AN ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE ON CAMPUS. IT COULD TAKE SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE WE HEARD BACK AND THE DATA WE RECEIVED WAS NOT ALWAYS IN THE FORMAT WE NEEDED. JOINING THE CAS HAS BEEN A REAL GAME CHANGER FOR US. WE ARE NOW ABLE TO INSTANTANEOUSLY FIND DATA AND PROVIDE IT TO OTHERS ON CAMPUS WHO NEED IT. ACROSS THE BOARD, THIS HAS INCREASED TRANSPARENCY AND HELPED US MAKE BETTER DECISIONS.**

”



# Hear From Your Peers During Liaison's Webinars

Every month, the CAS Community convenes leaders across disciplines to share their insights into strategic enrollment management. Sessions recently added to our on-demand library include:

## Reimagining Grad Student Recruitment: Lead Gen for 2021



**John Augusto, Ph.D.**  
Associate Dean, Strategic Initiatives  
Georgia State University



**Vincent James**  
Director, Admissions  
T.H. Chan School of Public Health  
Harvard University



**Michael zur Muehlen, Ph.D.**  
Associate Dean, Graduate Studies  
Stevens Institute of Technology

## Back to B-School: What It Will Take to Thrive This Fall and Beyond



**Shannon Deer, Ph.D.**  
Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs  
Mays Business School  
Texas A&M University  
Member of the BusinessCAS  
Advisory Board



**Dee Steinle**  
Executive Director, MBA and MSB  
Programs  
School of Business  
University of Kansas  
Vice Chair of the BusinessCAS  
Advisory Board

## Today's Higher Ed Challenges, Tomorrow's Workforce Opportunities



**Darla Spence Coffey, Ph.D.**  
President and CEO  
Council on Social Work Education



**Norman Fortenberry, Sc.D.**  
Executive Director  
American Society for  
Engineering Education



**Julia Kent, Ph.D.**  
Vice President, Best Practices  
and Strategic Initiatives  
Council of Graduate Schools



**Jenny Rickard, Ph.D.**  
President and CEO  
The Common Application



**Karen West, D.M.D.**  
President and CEO  
American Dental Education Association



**Nancy Zimpher, Ph.D.**  
Chancellor Emeritus  
State University of New York



View recordings of these and other sessions at [lsnedu.com/ondemand](https://lsnedu.com/ondemand)

# Reimagining College Access With Application Portfolios

by John Tierney  
Director of Partnerships



It's almost impossible to achieve equitable college admissions outcomes and the subsequent success of students without first understanding what motivates passionate, highly qualified applicants.

That's one reason more colleges and universities are using application portfolios as they adopt holistic admissions policies and look beyond traditional metrics such as test scores, essays and letters of recommendation in order to fill their enrollment funnels. It also explains why institutions like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Wheaton College, participants in the Learning Policy Institute's Reimagining College Access (RCA) initiative, leverage SlideRoom's multimedia application platforms to accept and review supplemental materials as part of their admissions processes.

With several years and cohorts of implementation, these programs provided great insights and sharable best practices in a recent webinar.

## Showing, not just telling

"The hands-on learning that students participate in is central to the MIT experience," said Stu Schmill, Dean of Admissions and Student Financial Services at MIT. "It was fairly clear to us some time ago that our application didn't really allow our admissions officers to evaluate students in that context. We want to allow students to show us their talents. The traditional college application isn't designed to do that.

"That's where SlideRoom portfolios come in. We recognized that there's a whole set of students doing projects or project-based work who didn't have a platform to demonstrate what they'd done. Using the SlideRoom platform, we developed our Maker Portfolio, which students use to tell us about their projects."

At Wheaton, according to Director of Admission Judy Purdy, the engagement benefits are similar: "We want to make clear to applicants that this is not necessarily additional work, but gives them an opportunity to showcase something they've already done – a class project or an internship experience – in a way traditional application formats don't allow. They are only used to help the students."

"We want to allow students to show us their talents. The traditional college application isn't designed to do that. That's where SlideRoom portfolios come in."

## Better inputs, better outputs

SlideRoom, which supports more than 30 different file types, optimizes the collection and review of portfolios that are submitted with applications, including those featuring rich media, video, images, audio and three-dimensional models.

After the first few application cycles, both MIT and Wheaton learned that a mindset change — from an open-ended call for materials to giving prompts for materials that reflect the qualities they want to measure — has enhanced the value of the assessments.

Stu Schmill  
Dean of Admissions and  
Student Financial Services



"We've learned to be more direct and to understand the context in which students have done their projects in order to ascertain their motivations, resourcefulness, collaborative and communication skills and willingness to take risk" said Schmill. "That context has made all the difference for us in the value we get from the portfolio submissions."

Wheaton used these lessons to evolve the model of traditional arts portfolios to the broader benefit of performance assessments for a greater set of academic disciplines. "We initially didn't know how to ask the right questions or give prompts to get what we wanted to understand — their passion, creativity and leadership skills— particularly outside of traditional arts portfolios," Purdy said.

## Yielding to enrollment success

For time-crunched admissions offices, the prospect of another application element might appear daunting, but at these institutions, the optional supplements benefit applicants and reviewers alike.

Purdy stated, "Most of them only take a few minutes to review, but ultimately they provide more clarity. We don't end up wondering so much. It helps us get to know the student a little bit better and helps sway some of the conversations to admit, wait list or deny."

She added that there are benefits, not just to admissions decisions but enrollment management and student success initiatives as well.

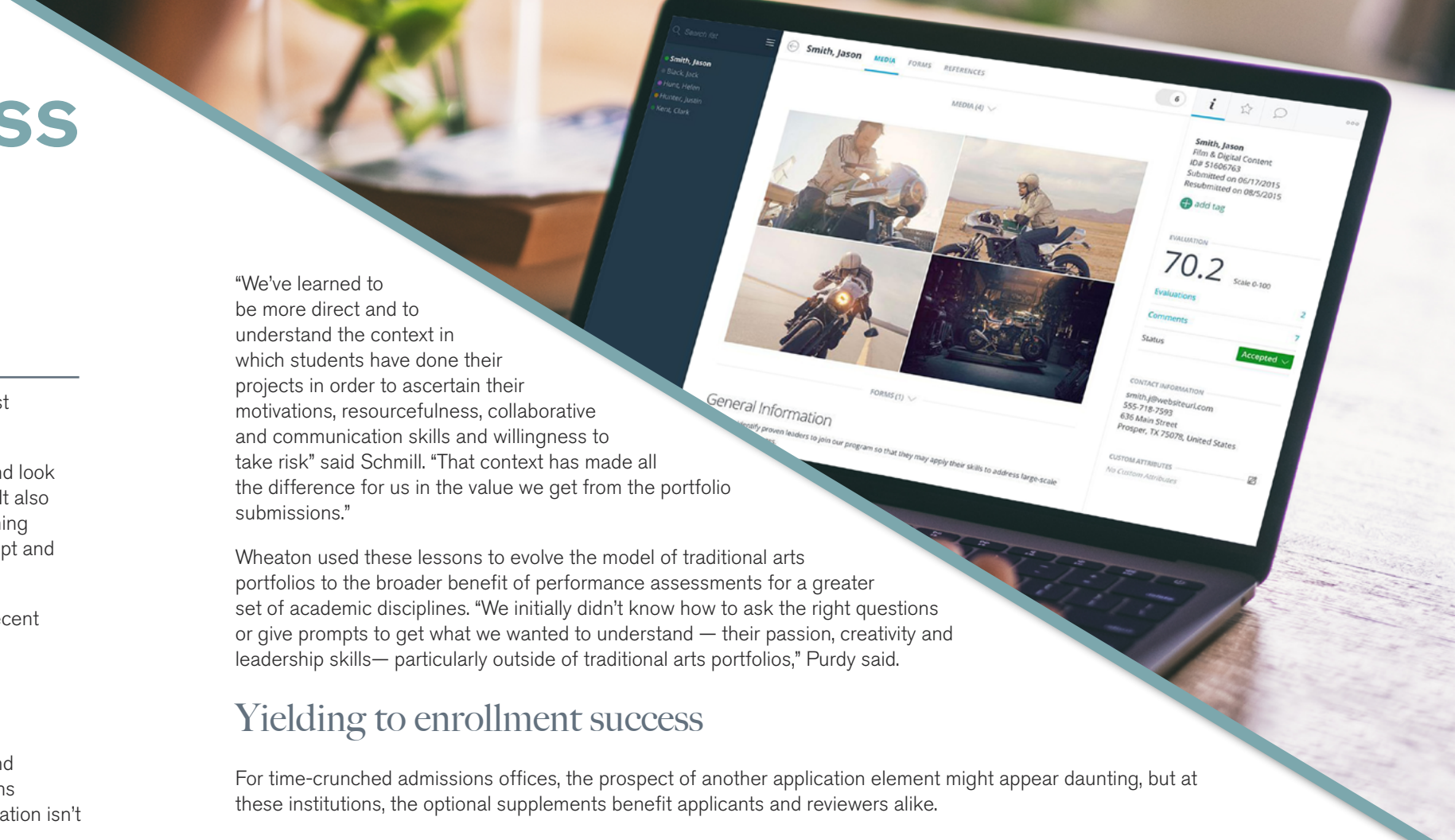
"We very much consider this a yield opportunity. For accepted applicants, we follow up and discuss how what they are doing would contribute to the kind of life they would have at Wheaton. From the faculty perspective, they more easily identify which students would make a huge difference in their department. We then use the portfolios to understand how we can help them once they enroll at Wheaton to achieve their goals."

Similarly, MIT involves faculty reviewers and outside alumni to help scale portfolio reviews and identify applicants who can thrive in their individual departments: "Something that one of our admissions officers thought was kind of boring would have a faculty member jumping up and down saying, 'This is the most amazing thing I've ever seen.'"

It's true that achieving equitable college admissions outcomes is a challenge, but with SlideRoom, admissions officers like Schmill and Purdy are able to better grasp what motivates the passionate, highly qualified applicants who go on to become successful MIT and Wheaton students.

**What would having more insight into your applicants' talents and passions mean for your next class? Find out by incorporating SlideRoom portfolios into your admissions review process. ■**

"We very much consider this a yield opportunity. From the faculty perspective, they more easily identify which students would make a huge difference in their departments."



# SHINING A LIGHT ON THE “PRIVILEGED POOR,” THE “DOUBLY DISADVANTAGED” AND THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF ELITE SPACES

A discussion with author Anthony Jack, Ph.D., about the relationship between cultural capital and the success of low-income students

Anthony Jack, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of education at Harvard's Graduate School of Education and bestselling author of *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*. The *Admissionist* recently spoke with Dr. Jack about his book and how his own educational journey shaped his views on ensuring the success of low-income students once they arrive on campus.

**The title of your book is *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*. What does the phrase “privileged poor” mean?**

When people talk about first-generation and lower-income college students, they often speak about them as a monolithic group. But when I went to Amherst College, many of my peers had gone to boarding, day and preparatory high schools, even though some of their parents were janitors or didn't even have jobs. They were economically poor, just like me, but they were privileged in the sense that they had experienced places like Amherst before their freshman year of college. They had studied abroad in high school. They had teachers with Ph.D.s. They had gotten accustomed to the concept of office hours because their schools were basically mini versions of a college. They shared the same language. So I thought, “Yeah, you're poor, but you're privileged.”

The privileged poor have what sociologists call a dominant cultural capital. They understand those ways of being that

mainstream and elite institutions take for granted. They know how to navigate the hidden curriculum of elite spaces. That's what I really want to bring attention to.

**Are elite institutions failing low-income students by not recognizing this?**

It's not just the elite that have this issue; it's higher education as a whole because the norms that permeate through higher education are middle-class norms. The hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten rules and unmet expectations that we expect students to abide by from the first day they set foot on campus. But unless you have had access to a campus before — whether through your parents, through the type of

schooling you had or through some kind of program — you're like a fish out of water. You are coming into a new place and learning new rules and new languages.

But if you come from an upper-middle-class household, where college has been a generational legacy, then you've heard about office hours, you've heard about internships and syllabi and prereqs. You know the language. You've been socialized to think about college as where you will be.

**Does the hidden curriculum permeate through higher education?**

Yes. And if we allow it to be the status quo, we'll be doing a disservice to those students who are new to higher education. When you get an opportunity to go to a school that serves as a mobility springboard, you want to make sure that you have every opportunity. But some students have no idea how to begin to take advantage of the opportunities or even what the opportunities are.

**You write about “doubly disadvantaged” students. What does that mean?**

I use the term doubly disadvantaged because I want people to pay attention to the fact that, in addition to being economically disadvantaged, some students have had no access to the type of educational experience and socialization that elite schools offer.

They weren't socialized to know about the Harkness method. They weren't socialized to think about studying abroad in high school. They weren't socialized to think

*Anthony Abraham Jack, Ph.D., is a junior fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows and an assistant professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.*

about internships and shadowing doctors as an every-summer thing while they were in high school. I wanted to move beyond the label of low income. I wanted to ask, “On what dimension of inequality does your experience rest?” That was very important to me. Being doubly disadvantaged — lacking economic capital and cultural capital — causes lower-income students to struggle in school, and draws even more attention to the fact that “colleges privilege privilege.”

**What else should educators understand about these students?**

We — as faculty, as administrators, as counselors — expect certain behaviors. We tend to reward students who adopt those behaviors without ever questioning why they feel more comfortable doing so. We think it's about their drive and their ingenuity, but oftentimes it's much more a reflection of their social class and upbringing rather than being a go-getter.

**How did your earlier education influence the way you think about helping other students seize economic and educational opportunities?**

I am a Head Start kid. My educational journey began at Head Start. I attended public middle and high schools that left a lot to be desired, but I transferred to a private school in the summer before my senior year of high school. That opened my eyes to just how drastically unequally I had been educated compared with those people whose fathers were the vice presidents of organizations or whose mothers were doctors. I went from a school with 35 students in my AP and IB classes to a prep school where my largest class was 15 students, and there were a lot of resources.

**How did that experience influence your success in college?**

In high school, our teachers could not leave school for one hour and four minutes at the end of every day. They had to make themselves available to any and all students who wanted to speak with them. By the

time I finished my senior year, I had gotten accustomed to that being the reality. I knew they would be there, that they were expecting me to come and that I should go. And so when I got to Amherst and people were talking about office hours, I understood. I already knew how to take advantage of the opportunity. Things like that were important to me and, in the end, helped me make that transition to Amherst.

**How can colleges and universities do a better job educating and empowering disadvantaged students?**

I think it's important that we do a better job of sharing what's in students' admissions files with the dean of students office and other support-providing offices on campus. Students lay it all out in the application. They've been told to tell certain stories to relay certain facts about who they are, where they come from, their family struggles, everything. We know how many of our students have been homeless. We know how many of our students have fraught relationships with their families and can't go home regardless of whether they have the resources to do it or not. We know who's experiencing difficulties, and yet that information isn't shared with, for example, the individuals who set housing policy on campus.

If you knew that students on your campus are homeless or effectively homeless, would you still close your campus during recesses in the same way? Or would you make provisions to help students secure housing and food during those recesses? Or will you continue to assume, again, that everyone departs campus for fun in the sun? This is where elite colleges, I believe, have failed students. These are questions that the admissions files can help us begin to answer.

We also need to understand much more deeply what urban and rural poverty looks like. What does it feel like? How does it limit the way students move through campus?

“

**I think it's important that we do a better job of sharing what's in students' admissions files with the dean of students office and other support-providing offices on campus. Students lay it all out in the application.”**

These are very important considerations that need to be pushed beyond the admissions process.

**What do you see as the broader implications of the pandemic on how these colleges and universities serve all students?**

I hope it changes the way we think about students' needs. When colleges abruptly shut down, they assumed people had places to go and the resources to get to those places. It demonstrated, in many ways, the kind of inequalities that we've ignored. Let us not forget those students who don't have an exit strategy.

I think the pandemic also shows that it's wrong to think about going virtual as a cure-all that can reduce inequalities. Online learning only happens if you can get online. What happens when you can't get online, when you just don't have access? Inequality runs deeper than many would even imagine. ■

# ADMISSIONS BIAS IN FOCUS

by Molly McCracken  
Marketing Consultant



Kira Talent

During the summer of 2020, Liaison and Kira Talent formed a partnership with the goal of helping higher education institutions better facilitate remote interviews with students and increase diversity through holistic admissions. Shortly thereafter, the editors of *The Admissionist* asked Kira's experts to elaborate on the importance of removing bias from the admissions process. Here's what they shared with us.

When Kira surveyed admissions offices, we found that 41% of schools had no process in place to reduce bias in the admissions process; of those schools, 71% had no intentions to add a process in the future. Without having conversations about admissions bias, you could unknowingly create an environment for bias to thrive.

To ensure a level playing field, you must first ensure your reviewers agree on what a "level playing field" means. Here are three common events in admissions offices that can lead to decisions being impacted by bias:

- Having one reviewer review a file and make a recommendation without a second set of eyes
- Lacking a consistent and documented scorecard across all applicants and just collecting a "yea" or "nay"
- Assuming reviewers have a shared definition of subjective criteria — e.g., "leadership," "empathy" or "fit"

In each of the above cases, a single person's view of the world impacts the fate of the student. On top of such inconsistency, we also have our own limitations to consider. Generally speaking, we now have more choices than any other generation before us. In fact, researchers suggest the average person makes an average of 35,000 decisions a day. Decision fatigue is a very real problem. It shows itself in your inability to choose what restaurant to pick, what show to watch on Netflix and even in your decision to admit or reject a prospective student. When your decision-making capacities are fatigued, because of back-to-back interview days or late nights of file reading, your brain relies on shortcuts and patterns (i.e., biases) without you even realizing it.

## TYPES OF COGNITIVE BIAS IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

### Ingroup

Giving preference to a person or organization that aligns with one's own group

*"This student is from the same town as me; We both attended the same summer camp; We were both raised by single mothers."*

### Recency

Assigning more weight or importance to a recent event or interaction than others in the past

*Scoring an applicant who interviewed on Friday afternoon higher than an applicant who interviewed on Tuesday afternoon because they are more recent in memory*

### Groupthink

When members of a group set aside their own opinions, beliefs or ideas to achieve harmony

*In a committee meeting, a reviewer goes along with a decision for or against an admissions decision to avoid conflict with a peer*

### Halo Effect

When one remarkable quality influences other factors in a decision

*An applicant has not met all admissions criteria, but they published one paper or worked one particularly impressive internship*

## HOW TO START REDUCING BIAS IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

### STRIVE FOR CONSISTENCY IN THE REVIEW PROCESS

Leveling the playing field involves making sure you create an environment where all applicants have an equal opportunity to be successful. You can do this by creating consistency in the applicant experience.

#### Steps to take:

- ▶ Avoid the over-influence of any personal biases by having two or more committee members review applicants.
- ▶ Prevent the impact of groupthink by having reviewers evaluate applicants independently and document their evaluations before swapping notes.
- ▶ Use structured interviews to ensure applicants get similar questions in similar environments and are reviewed on similar criteria.

### CREATE DOCUMENTATION AND TRAINING

If you have a committee of reviewers, their understandings of any key terms will be unique to their experience and relationship with your school. To say an applicant wasn't a "culture fit" or lacked "leadership" means very little if you cannot explain exactly what that means for your school.

Your school's mission and core values, and the traits exhibited by your top students and alumni, can help you articulate definitions for the hardest-to-define criteria.

#### Steps to take:

- ▶ Document definitions and create scorecards for the subjective criteria you evaluate.
- ▶ Create a training program to educate each reviewer on these definitions and scorecards.
- ▶ Test reviewers' abilities to use these resources.

We've just started to scratch the surface in this article by identifying ways to reduce the role bias plays in your existing practices. To take the next step and truly tackle bias in admissions, consider how admissions bias may be inherently baked into your practices by thinking about:

- Your evaluation of demonstrated interest scores.
- How your school's preferences for legacy, domestic or international applicants affects outcomes.
- The role (or lack of role) Affirmative Action and standardized tests have at your school.
- The political, gender, racial and socioeconomic make-up of your admissions committee, faculty, alumni and leadership. ■

# Partner Spotlight:



Spanning 14 states across America's heartland, the Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools (MAGS) is a regional affiliate of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS). With a focus on solving common problems and learning from its members in a community of practice, MAGS has played an active role in supporting its constituents through the challenges of the past year.

Julie Masteron, Ph.D., Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate College at Missouri State University, serves as the group's chair. This fall, she's organized a series of social events, learning workshops and presentations to help its members navigate what promises to be an unusual academic year.

Graduate programs across the U.S. will face many similar challenges this year: ubiquitous public health concerns, calls for dismantling systemic inequality and budget cuts brought about by the recession. However, the answers to these problems will not be one-size-fits-all, and having a regional association like MAGS to strategize specific solutions to the unique needs of its members is essential.

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# University of Tennessee at Martin: Why CAS Onboarding was a “Fantastic Experience”



**T**he University of Tennessee at Martin (UT Martin) is a comprehensive public university providing high-quality undergraduate and graduate educational programs to students from West Tennessee and beyond. It offers graduate degrees in Agriculture & Natural Resources, Business Administration, Counseling, Educational Leadership, Teaching, Family and Consumer Sciences and Strategic Communications. UT Martin recently joined BusinessCAS and GradCAS™, the Centralized Application Service (CAS) Communities for graduate management education and graduate education, respectively. Shortly thereafter, Liaison spoke with Joseph Mehlhorn, Ph.D., Interim Dean of Graduate Studies, and Jolene Cunningham, Student Services Specialist, to learn more about their experience with the CASs so far.

### What was your application experience like before you joined BusinessCAS and GradCAS?

**Jolene Cunningham (JC):** Gathering all of the necessary documents was piecemeal. We received one submission at a time, and we had to spend a lot of time and effort just trying to keep it all organized.

**Joseph Mehlhorn, Ph.D. (JM):** The old process made it a nightmare of a job! That's one of the reasons we were looking to streamline with BusinessCAS and GradCAS.

### Can you tell us more about your experience so far?

**JC:** Really, I think CAS has improved everything for us! Now, all of our admissions documents and data are stored in one central location. And it's been a lot easier for us regarding verification and transcripts, especially with international students.

Thanks to CAS, we were ready to go remote even before COVID-19 closed our campus. Our coordinators didn't experience any delay in engaging applicants, and they could easily see communication histories for each contact.

**JM:** Despite the challenges introduced by the pandemic, our application numbers are actually up. I don't think we could have processed all of the applications we received this year on our old system. There's no way that we could have physically managed our workload without the complementary support and application processing services that come with the CAS technology.

### What advice would you give to others considering joining the CAS Community?

**JM:** If you want to focus your staff on engaging applicants rather than coordinating application packaging, CAS is for you! Not only that, but it'll also give you an easy way to report to university leadership about how many applications you've received and the status of each one, and it's a must if you have a small staff but a large application processing workload.

**JC:** You'll be in good hands with Liaison's staff from the very beginning. They walked us through the onboarding process step by step. It was a fantastic onboarding experience! ■



Read more testimonials from CAS Community members at [lsnedu.com/testimonials](https://lsnedu.com/testimonials)

# EASY DATA INTEGRATION IN ACTION: HOW LIAISON TOOK THE BURDEN OFF THE IT DEPARTMENT AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

by Greg Martin  
Manager of Client Delivery



Generally speaking, the phrase “data integration project” probably doesn’t fill most people, whether in IT offices or admissions offices, with joy. However, it’s different when you work with Liaison. Unlike our competitors, we don’t just deliver software and exit the picture. Thanks to our expertise and ongoing dedication to delivering unparalleled service, the short- and long-term benefits of a Liaison data integration initiative make life easier for everyone, from IT specialists to admissions teams, administrators and applicants alike.

**“We’re now expecting to see a time savings for IT and a better experience for the applicants and the faculty reviewers. This is a win-win situation.”**

Christopher M. Rios, Ph.D.  
Associate Dean



At Baylor University, integrating Liaison’s EngineeringCAS™ — the only Centralized Application Service (CAS) for graduate engineering programs — enhanced not only the engineering program’s application experience but also the collaboration and admissions processes of several other departments across campus. The lessons learned by everyone involved highlight the benefits of embracing new technology, services and partnerships.

By the time Baylor joined EngineeringCAS, the Waco, Texas-based research institution

already had several other discipline-specific CASs on its campus, including those used by its physical therapy and public health programs. Why? Because even though each of Baylor’s programs serves different types of students and professions, they all came to the conclusion that the application technology and marketing benefits provided by a CAS offer the most effective way for applicants and admissions offices to discover and interact with each other.

## A passion for making life better

As Baylor was preparing to integrate EngineeringCAS, leaders there decided it also made sense to take the next step forward by centralizing and streamlining all of their CASs simultaneously. They were aware of Liaison’s extensive resources available for such a job — including its five-phase, 21-step framework created specifically to help institutions accomplish successful CAS data integrations — and asked Liaison to help.

“The goal was to create a process to make life better,” said Associate Dean Christopher M. Rios, Ph.D. “We’re now expecting to see a time savings for IT and a better experience for the applicants and the faculty reviewers. This is a win-win situation.”

According to Dr. Rios, engaging all of the university’s stakeholders early in the process was the key to success.

“One of the things that has helped me develop my relationship with IT is recognizing that their work is critical,” he said. “Admissions is a core function of the institution, and it is increasingly dependent on technology. We had to bring our IT team into the conversation early. Understandably, they’re frustrated when you bring them into the conversation later because they can see potential complications that may not even be on your radar. Ultimately, it allowed us to better serve those programs that had a

slightly disconnected relationship with our admissions process.”

He continued: “Before we made decisions, we brought everyone together, including Liaison, and asked, ‘What do you want this process to look like?’ It’s easy for those of us who come from the academic side to overlook, or take for granted, the people on campus whose passion it is to make the university work. But sitting in on these conversations — even when I was way out of my depth — gave me a real appreciation for the crucial work they do. They have a real passion for improving the lives of the people using the processes we were developing.”

Michael Scott, a joint MBA/MSIS student at Baylor who also worked part-time on the integration project, said the IT department’s goal was to “standardize everything and streamline everything.”

“Centralizing our CASs during the EngineeringCAS integration created efficiencies across campus in almost every area, from designing the applications to writing requirements to standardizing and streamlining data exports,” he said. Scott also described Liaison’s support team as “amazing.”

“Liaison was very supportive and answered all of our questions very quickly,” he said. “Baylor is really starting to grow, and we’re at a pivotal point. Establishing the standardization of integration was critical to our future success.”

## “Liaison is listening”

The ability to add custom questions to the EngineeringCAS application also pays dividends, according to David Winkler, a Ph.D. student in higher education leadership who works as a graduate assistant in enrollment at Baylor.

**“Without a doubt, the decision to work with Liaison was the key to our success.”**

David Winkler  
Ph.D. Candidate and Graduate  
Assistant in Enrollment



“Those custom questions really help us dial in and learn more about applicants before we look at their applications,” he said. “That allows us to provide resources and assistance to students who might need them.”

“Liaison is listening to institutions,” he said. “When we had questions or suggestions or recommendations about future integrations of CAS, they were willing to look into them.”

“Liaison’s been great,” he added. “Not only with this transition but also with how you should talk to students and how to get students interested in your program. Without a doubt, the decision to work with Liaison was the key to our success.” ■

## The Eight Elements of a Liaison Data Integration:

1. **Collect** – Gather data.
2. **Structure** – Organize collected data.
3. **Extract** — Retrieve data.
4. **Transit** — Move data to local systems.
5. **Transform** — Alter data to match local formats.
6. **Load** — Input data to local systems.
7. **Quality control** — Review data for accuracy.
8. **Use** — Incorporate data in business processes.



# APPLYING TO BUSINESS SCHOOL DURING COVID-19

by Loubna Bouamane, Ph.D.  
Founder



The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the second part of the Fall 2020 recruiting cycle, and Fall 2021 is shaping up to be equally as challenging. Although most business schools have been actively communicating with applicants and adjusting admissions requirements to address the uncertainty around travel restrictions, testing options and classroom format, applicants are still nervously wondering how the pandemic will affect their applications this coming year.

As a former director of admissions, my role was very much focused on providing our prospective students the smoothest application experience possible. We were able to streamline our processes by joining BusinessCAS™, a virtual marketplace which allows for applicants to apply to multiple business schools and programs by submitting one single set of supporting documents. At the time, I was missing out on a major part of applicants' journeys: What happens before they select a school? Or initiate an application? As an MBA admissions consultant, I am now involved in their journey to business school very early on.

This past recruiting cycle has been a whirlwind from the applicants' perspective. Because of testing center closures and visa restrictions, many schools have decided to push back their final deadlines in order to accommodate students who were unable to take standardized tests on time. Other schools have offered to waive testing requirements altogether. This, in turn, created a wave of "last minute" applications starting in April from candidates who were initially considering applying a couple of years down the road. At the time, we saw a spike in the number of phone calls and inquiries about our consulting services. The majority were domestic applicants looking to take advantage of what they perceived as a "less competitive" round of applications as many international admits decided to defer their admission.

As soon as their applications were submitted, however, many shared their concerns about potentially starting the fall semester online. Several of our applicants changed target schools early on based on communications they received from admissions offices regarding the format of fall classes. For the most part, they felt that starting the fall semester (and possibly spring semester as well) virtually would rob them of the opportunity to build a strong personal network that a full, immersive, on-campus experience typically provides.

Furthermore, there was a strong concern regarding job recruiting events on campus. What would these look like in the context of a pandemic? Will schools host virtual recruiting fairs? How will it impact their post-MBA job prospects?

## GME: TODAY & TOMORROW

This article first appeared in Liaison's bi-annual magazine devoted to the art, science and industry of graduate management education admissions. To read more articles like this, download the latest issue of GME: Today & Tomorrow at [lsnedu.com/gme-today-tomorrow](https://lsnedu.com/gme-today-tomorrow)

These questions became central in many conversations with our applicants. The situation was so fluid early last spring that getting a definite answer was close to impossible despite business schools' best efforts.

Then, earlier this summer, came the announcement that F-1 visa holders may go out of status if they were to take online courses on a full-time basis. Although the decision was reversed down the line, this announcement sent a shock wave through international applicants. As a result, many have decided to postpone their MBA plans or chose to prioritize non-U.S. schools. In addition, the uncertainty around optional practical training (OPT) has pushed many potential applicants to reconsider their plan to study in the U.S. altogether. It's too early to say if this trend will be reversed later in this recruiting cycle.

Fast forward to late summer, in the context of a declining economy, many young professionals got laid off or furloughed from their jobs. We saw a wave of potential applicants coming in. Most have solid work experience and are looking to "weather out" this recession by going back to school for an MBA and graduating two years from now with a new set of skills and a stronger network in a stronger economy. In addition to this wave of highly qualified domestic applicants, many international students, who had deferred their admissions, will likely claim their spots next fall and contribute to make this new recruiting cycle perhaps one of the most competitive in years.

Many applicants are reaching out to consultants in order to increase their chances of admission into their top choices. They are well aware that this cycle is shaping up to be one of the most competitive to date and are being proactive by starting their applications early on and taking standardized tests multiple times to increase their scores. Despite the uncertainty of what Fall 2021 will look like in terms of class delivery, the value of an MBA, particularly in a very competitive job market, is unquestionable among applicants.

More than ever, business schools need to keep the lines of communication with prospective applicants open. As a member of the BusinessCAS advisory board, I've witnessed firsthand how business school leaders and GME professionals are coming together and being proactive to ensure applicants' concerns are addressed and that they get the best experience possible applying to and enrolling in their program of choice. Sharing best practices and developing innovative ways to improve the applicant experience during one of the most challenging years GME has experienced in decades are perhaps some of the most rewarding aspects of being part of this community. ■

# THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

The Winter 2021 issue of *The Admissionist* will be devoted to topics exploring “the power of community” in higher education admissions, marketing and thought leadership.

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# 3 Resources to Better Engage Your In Progress Applicants

by Jennifer Raab  
Learning Experience Designer



Reggie Ross, a Learning Strategist on Liaison's Education and Knowledge Team, facilitates a workshop at the 2019 Liaison User Conference.

The traditional admissions funnel is changing as institutions are beginning to see more “stealth applicants,” or applicants whose first official communication with an institution is their application submission. Without transparency into how many applicants will actually apply to your programs, how can you stay on track to meet your enrollment goals? Leverage tools in your Centralized Application Service (CAS) to engage your hottest leads: In Progress applicants.

In Progress applicants are those who have selected your program in the CAS, raising their hands for more information as they make this important decision in their educational careers. Many CASs allow you to view — and communicate — with these applicants throughout the recruitment process.\* Check out these three resources from Liaison Academy to ensure you're driving these applicants to apply — and enroll — at your institution.

### Guides

The WebAdMIT Help Center offers a broad range of content that covers everything from getting started to taking advantage of Liaison's latest product enhancements and newly released features. These three guides specifically cover ways to engage In Progress applicants.

- ▶ **Data Visibility of In Progress Applicants Guide:** Understand what In Progress applicant data you can view.
- ▶ **Local Statuses Best Practices Guide:** Track In Progress applicants with a Local Status, where applicable, and learn best practices.
- ▶ **Transferring Data into WebAdMIT Guide:** Know what data transfers to WebAdMIT and when.

### Webinars

Since we know you're busy, Liaison Academy offers both on-demand and live webinars that cover hot topics in strategic enrollment management. These three sessions will prepare you to work targeting In Progress applicants into your recruitment process.

- ▶ **Exploring Emails in WebAdMIT:** Learn how to create and send emails to In Progress (and all other) applicants.
- ▶ **Analyzing Your Applicant Data in WebAdMIT:** Use Export Manager and Report Manager to your advantage in identifying In Progress applications.
- ▶ **Making WebAdMIT Work for You:** Harness the power of the List Manager to help you identify applicants throughout your admissions process.

### Virtual Courses

If you're looking for a deep dive, consider taking advantage of our premium training opportunities. This one will cover strategic planning and offer actionable ways to incorporate what's covered into your process.

- ▶ **Enrollment Marketing for a Competitive Advantage:** Walk away with a strategic communication plan and knowledge of the WebAdMIT tools to help you move applicants through the funnel. ■

Find more training opportunities like these at [academy.liaisonedu.com/admissionist](https://academy.liaisonedu.com/admissionist)

\*If you're not sure if your CAS allows access to In Progress applicants, contact your Account Manager for assistance.





# Today's Higher Ed Challenges, Tomorrow's Workforce Opportunities

Higher education is in a period of undeniable flux, partially in response to the global pandemic, but also due to trends that have culminated across several decades. Issues ranging from equitable access to education, to evolving models of teaching to bridging the gap between academia and the workplace are forcing higher-ed leaders to address a wide range of vital questions.

Liaison recently hosted a virtual forum called "Today's Higher Ed Challenges, Tomorrow's Workforce Opportunities," which examined how institutions are addressing these issues while adapting to uncertain times and creating new practices on the fly. Moderated by Robert Ruiz, Liaison's Vice President of Strategic Enrollment, the forum included Nancy Zimpher, Ph.D. (Chancellor Emeritus, State University of New York), Jenny Rickard, Ph.D. (President and Chief Enrollment

Officer, Common Application), Norman Fortenberry, Sc.D. (Executive Director, American Society for Engineering Education), Karen West, D.M.D. (President and CEO, American Dental Education Association), Darla Spence Coffey, Ph.D. (President and Chief Executive Officer, Council on Social Work Education) and Julia Kent, Ph.D. (Vice President of Best Practices and Strategic Initiatives, Council of Graduate Schools).

The following comments, which have been edited for clarity and length, represent key takeaways from the forum.

## Why does access to higher education matter now more than ever?

**Dr. Jenny Rickard:** The pandemic has made us all very familiar with the fact that low-income, first generation college students and underrepresented groups

— underrepresented minority students in particular — have been underserved by our system for years. When you consider the fact that just 9% of students from the lowest income quartile graduate with a bachelor's degree by age 24 compared to 77% in the top income quartile, and then you add in the pandemic, it's incredibly sobering.

But I've always been an optimist. The social justice demonstrations and the pandemic are shining an incredibly bright light on issues of equity, and I think that gives us incredible opportunity. Disparities that we've already known about are now exacerbated tremendously for students. About 100,000 fewer high school seniors completed the FAFSA this year.

Last year, about 55% of our 900-plus college and university members always required a

standardized test. This year, 83% are either test blind, test optional or test flexible, which I'm hoping will eliminate that barrier for students who now know they can apply even without a test score. That has enabled our college and university members to think differently about how they even look at an application in terms of other non-cognitive factors that could be predictive of success. Schools will be looking at students much more holistically and that, I hope, will give more students the access that they deserve.

At the Common App, we've been using an artificial intelligence chatbot to offer support to low-income, first generation and underrepresented minority students. If the chatbot isn't able to answer their question, we put them together with a live human being to help them. I share this because we found that we had an engagement rate of over 60% in that effort.

We all need to think very differently about what we've done before, to make sure that the students who have already been left out of the mix in higher education are not disadvantaged any further. We need to create new systems that actually help them access higher education in greater numbers.

## What are you doing to help schools navigate through today's challenges, particularly as they relate to international students?

**Dr. Norman Fortenberry:** The changing political environment has added to the stress of international students, particularly in terms of how welcome they feel in this country. So we have seen a number of efforts arising spontaneously across individual campuses to build more welcoming and supportive environments for international students at the undergraduate and graduate level. It's important to let them know that there is still a significant community that appreciates scholarship and understands that scholarship does not have boundaries. Scholarship advances by peer collaboration, and we are supportive of that.

## How do we convince graduate students that a Ph.D. and a career in the academy is the right thing to do given where we stand today?

**Dr. Julia Kent:** I would separate the attractiveness of a Ph.D. from the attractiveness of a post-Ph.D. career. We know from our research on Ph.D. career pathways that many Ph.D.s go on to careers in other sectors of the workforce and will continue to do so. When you look at the different challenges that we have today, it really demonstrates the importance of having Ph.D.s working in government, working in the non-profit sector and working in industry to solve the problems that we're facing. From that perspective, it's incredibly important that students continue to see a Ph.D. as a desirable degree and a path to a variety of careers.

It's also important that we continue to focus on diversity and inclusion at this time because the perspectives that students bring from different experiences and communities will be critical to coming up with solutions for every community that has needs. It is critical for graduate admissions committees to consider the ways that this pandemic may have impacted different groups of students in different ways.

CGS was supportive of holistic admissions before the pandemic, but this became an opportunity to reiterate its importance and to ask students questions about how they responded to some of the challenges that COVID-19 threw their way. This is an opportunity to demonstrate some of those skills and qualities and to consider how some students are struggling with bigger challenges than others.

## Some professions require extensive hands-on practical clinical training. How are you helping your member schools and students avoid disruptions in education posed by the pandemic?

**Dr. Darla Spence Coffey:** A key component

of social work education at the baccalaureate and the master's level is a substantial number of clinical field hours. We want our students to have the experience of working with individuals, families, communities and organizations in order to be able to put the theory to practice. It's what we call our signature pedagogy.

When everything turned upside down, we needed to think about putting programs and our field experiences on virtual platforms. The good news is that a lot of places were already poised to do this, and the pandemic really accelerated some promising practices. We've learned a lot about telehealth, tele mental health and telemedicine in social work. We've even started calling it "total social work." We need to make sure that we are preparing our students to practice on these various platforms.

In April, we reduced the number of field hours required at the baccalaureate and at the master's level by 15%. That was an acknowledgement that the agencies and organizations where students do their internships were still trying to figure out how they were going to continue to provide services during the pandemic. That's allowed us to begin asking some hard questions that I think we probably should have been asking long before now. We have been assuming equivalence between competency and just putting in time. This has been an opportunity for us to really begin to question those basic assumptions. I think this has been a really good thing for us. I hope we don't lose heart.

Of course, questions around enduring and historic institutional and systemic racism are very, very top of mind for us right now. If we're going to provide equity for different groups, we're going to need to provide different kinds of services. There's a disparity in outcomes for our students, for families and for the individuals we're working with. That's what we need to focus on.

**Dr. Karen West:** In dental education, it's been a little bit easier for us to adapt because most clinical experience occurs within the academic building. The main problem is that students are not exposed to the variety of practice settings that we would like them to be exposed to. However, dental schools are a safety net for underserved populations, and the majority of our schools have actually seen an increase in the numbers of patients coming in for emergency care and for comprehensive care. So those schools are still providing opportunities for their students. In addition, we've also seen the growth of teledentistry, and we're trying to encourage legislation to allow that in more states.

**Are the gaps in our health care system, our higher education system and our criminal justice system all connected?**

**Dr. Nancy Zimpher:** They should be connected, but I'm not sure they are. The connectivity between early childhood, elementary and secondary education and

then college, graduate school and career, is very tenuous. But I hope we've learned more about our dependency on each other during the pandemic, and about how that needs to materialize so that we can continue to meet the needs of our students and programs in the future. I fundamentally believe that we have to connect the dots in these pipelines. To do that, we need to be able to see our system from the students' point of view.

**What have you learned during 2020 about the people you serve?**

**Dr. Darla Spence Coffey:** I feel our students and learners are the big story coming out of the pandemic. Students have been very active and vocal about programs accommodating their needs and aspirations. I don't know what social work, and higher education in general, is going to look like in the future. But it will be different, because the students are demanding it. Within social work, we are very seriously and honestly examining institutional and systemic racism. We're looking at our curriculum. We're

looking at who gets studied. We're looking at indigenous knowledges. There's lots of talk about decolonizing the curriculum.

**What advice would you give your peers in these challenging times?**

**Dr. Jenny Rickard:** Remember that you're not alone. You have so many colleagues in the same situation. As much as you can, get support. And support others who are going through what you're going through. Also, as you're thinking about what you're doing, keep in mind that education is fundamentally important for individuals to be able to change their lives and to change our society. What you're doing is critically important. Helping students gain access to education is incredible work. You're doing life-changing work for people. ■



# How Graduate Education Serves the Public Good

by Laura Nicole Miller **THE ADMISSIONIST**  
Editor-in-Chief by LIAISON

In light of the significant disruptions to graduate education imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent game-changing trends in our culture and economy, it is now more important than ever for people who advocate on behalf of graduate education to make the case for its importance to society as a whole.

"Historically, advocates of graduate education have emphasized the personal advantages individuals derive from it, such as greater income potential, improved employment prospects and better physical and mental health compared with those who have lesser levels of education," said Michael T. Nietzel, Ph.D., President Emeritus of Missouri State University.

"Yet in order to effectively engage and win the support of other key stakeholders — including policymakers — educators also need to emphasize the invaluable benefits that graduate education can bring to everyone: professional expertise, valuable discoveries, secondary economic effects and the fact that having a higher proportion of people with graduate degrees makes communities stronger."

## Making connections

Among policymakers, Dr. Nietzel said, there tends to be a perception that graduate education is a luxury that some people have the privilege to pursue. Policymakers don't always see it as a necessity, even though graduate degrees are becoming increasingly important in a large number of fields. As a result, there's a preference among them for graduate education to be supported with tuition rather than public subsidies.

He believes that's why it's crucial for graduate educators to tie funding requests not just to specific graduate education initiatives at their institutions but also to the overarching benefits they bring to communities.

"In Missouri, the legislature and governor approved appropriations to expand capacity in existing healthcare programs several years ago," he said. "That was tied to an agreement that existing healthcare programs in the state's public universities would increase their output of nurses, physician assistants and other in-demand graduates. The increased funding also went toward adding faculty and, in some cases, adding stipend support for graduate students to enroll in those programs.

"The appeal to the legislature and to the governor was, 'You don't have to invest in startups. We have programs here that are already accredited and successful.' So, from their point of view, it was money well spent, or what some refer to as 'efficient money.' Efficient money is very important to policymakers because it minimizes the risks to them."

## All policy is local

Policymakers also love being able to connect valuable discoveries and innovations to the people, institutions and areas they represent. According to Dr. Nietzel, more than 800 new consumer products derived from academic research came onto the market in 2018, as did more than 7,600 new patents. Over 1,000 new startups formed, and 70% of those new businesses stayed in the home state where the founder's educational institution was located.

"Every institution has a compelling story to tell, even if it might not be quite as exciting as Stanford's Google story. The important thing is to find your institution's story and tell it in a way that makes a significant impression on public policymakers.

"Remember, too, that graduate education also creates economic spillovers. That happens when financial benefits related to an individual's education are realized by a third party who didn't directly participate in that education. Among other things, individuals with a graduate education generally pay more taxes during their lifetimes, require less public assistance and raise children who are more likely to achieve higher levels of post-secondary education. There is also convincing data showing that they drive economic opportunities for less educated workers through job creation and spending in service and retail industries."

In addition, Dr. Nietzel said, their greater-than-average tendency to participate in philanthropy, volunteering and civic activities such as voting means that individuals who hold graduate degrees are typically more involved with their communities and, in turn, make them better for everyone.

And that's exactly what the goal of graduate education should be.

*This article was based on comments made by Dr. Nietzel during the [Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools \(MAGS\) Fall Signature Event, which is available for on-demand viewing now.](#) ■*

View the on-demand recording of this discussion at  
[lsnedu.com/higher-ed-challenges](https://lsnedu.com/higher-ed-challenges)



**Jenny Rickard, Ph.D.**  
President and CEO  
The Common Application



**Nancy Zimpher, Ph.D.**  
Chancellor Emeritus  
State University of New York



**Norman Fortenberry, Sc.D.**  
Executive Director  
American Society for  
Engineering Education



**Karen West, D.M.D.**  
President and CEO  
American Dental  
Education Association



**Darla Spence Coffey, Ph.D.**  
President and CEO  
Council on Social  
Work Education



**Julia Kent, Ph.D.**  
Vice President,  
Best Practices and Strategic Initiatives  
Council of Graduate Schools

# If You Don't Know What "Personalized Print" Really Is, You'll Miss Your Enrollment Goals This Year

by Sean Fitzgerald  
Associate Vice President of Enrollment  
Marketing Solutions



In my 15 years helping schools implement omni-channel communication plans, I've seen firsthand the difference between personalized print that works — and personalized print that barely catches its recipients' attention. What do I mean by works? When Liaison's enrollment marketing clients combined their emails with personalized print, they saw a 37% higher open rate for those emails and a 14% increase in click-through rates. Industry studies support what these clients have experienced: Across industries, marketers have seen a 500% increase in responses when direct mail is personalized.

All of that's to say that personalized print is not a gimmick — that is, if you use it correctly. If you're responsible for yielding your institution's next class, keep these best practices in mind as you re-think the role that print will play in your communication strategy.

**Andrew,**  
Let's get started on your career path with a degree in Civil Engineering!

**Athletics & Campus Life**  
Campus life and living at MSOE are as much part of the learning experience as any class of lab. There are plenty of student activities, student leadership projects and volunteer opportunities to choose from that will build your character and your resume.

**Civil Engineering**  
Starting Salary **60K** Civil Engineering  
Job Placement Rate **100%** Civil Engineering

MSOE highlights what matters most to each individual applicant on their direct mail pieces. Their results: Working with Liaison, they increased enrollment by 15% and increased their number of applications by 15% from 2017 to 2018.

“Content relevancy” is king.

The more relevant your content, the more likely your message will be read. Using your prospective applicant's name counts as one point — aim for at least seven points of personalization for each student and for each mailer to each student. Will Steve's athletic prowess help him find his place in your community? Will your high tech equipment provide just what he needs for his biology-intensive coursework? Will your reputation as a research institution help him when he makes the next step in his educational career? Can he bring his family dog to school to help him cope with homesickness? Tell him!

Words aren't enough.

The good news: Your 7+ points of personalization don't have to — and shouldn't — all be in your copy. Get and keep Steve's attention with:

- ▶ Photos of campus that show off your state-of-the-art labs.
- ▶ Infographics that call attention to your most impressive statistics.
- ▶ Charts that help Steve compare the options he has when it comes to his undergrad institution.
- ▶ Specific financial aid information to assuage his fears about paying for school.
- ▶ Geographic pinpoints on maps to highlight your proximity to local landmarks.

Your goal should be to “communicate with” rather than “talk at” prospective students.

Data makes it powerful.

Direct mail, even the stuff that gets tossed, gets at least glanced at — yes, even in 2020. In fact, 90% of direct mail gets opened, compared to only 20-30% of emails, and relevant print content, combined with email, has been shown to increase response rates by 10X.

Still, personalized print can be expensive if you apply the classic “spray-and-pray method.” Liaison's clients, however, have been able to decrease their spend by as much as 30% while increasing their responses. How? By following these three best practices and the others that we covered during Reasons to Re-Think Print. Access an on-demand version of the webinar [here](#).

**96% PLACEMENT RATE AFTER GRADUATION**

**\$48K AVERAGE STARTING SALARY OF GRADUATES SURVEYED**

**87% OF K-STATE POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS RECEIVE FINANCIAL AID**

**66% OF LEARNING SPACE ON CAMPUS IS HANDS-ON LABS**

**my.polytechnicexperience.com/JamesBowman**

**Jimmy, YOUR FINANCIAL AID**

<b>Estimated Direct Expenses</b> (from estimated expenses)	
Tuition & Fees	\$1,500.00
Books	\$1,100.00
<b>Total estimated direct expenses</b>	<b>\$2,600.00</b>
<b>Estimated Indirect Expenses</b> (from estimated expenses)	
Room	\$0.00
Food	\$200.00
<b>Total estimated indirect expenses</b>	<b>\$200.00</b>
<b>Your estimated total expenses for this year</b>	<b>\$2,800.00</b>
<b>Financial Aid Awards and Offers</b> (includes Kansas State Polytechnic, State and Federal Funds)	
Parent Family Educational Assistance	\$1,800.00
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	\$1,040.00
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	\$1,840.00
Federal Pell Grant	\$1,040.00
<b>Total Financial Aid Awards and Offers</b>	<b>\$5,680.00</b>
<b>Your estimated net price for this year</b>	<b>\$1,120.00</b>

**SCHOLARSHIPS PUT YOUR GOAL WITHIN REACH.**

"I take my education very seriously and the scholarships that I have received at Kansas State Polytechnic allow me to focus on academic success. Because of financial assistance, I don't have the added distraction and pressure of working a part-time job while earning my degree and flight hours."

**MADDIE PERRY**  
Scholarship Recipient

Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus leveraged Liaison's personalized print to increase their number of new students by 53% over the previous year and enroll more students in 12 of its 16 programs.

# CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS



**LOUBNA BOUAMANE, PH.D.**  
Founder, The Admission Concierge

Dr. Bouamane received her Ph.D. from the University of Paris VII and has over 15 years' experience in higher education. She has worked in several business schools, including Babson College and Harvard Business School, and she most recently served as the director of MBA admissions at the University of Miami's Herbert Business School for five years.



**SEAN FITZGERALD**  
Associate Vice President of Enrollment Marketing Solutions, Liaison

Sean has been a part of the Liaison team since 1999. In that time, he's worked with higher ed institutions to develop one-to-one marketing programs that best meet their objectives and achieve the greatest ROI.



**ANTHONY ABRAHAM JACK, PH.D.**  
Author, *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*

Dr. Jack received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 2016. He's a junior fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows and an assistant professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He holds the Shutzer Assistant Professorship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.



**GREG MARTIN**  
Client Delivery Manager, Liaison

Greg's role is to make it easier for colleges and universities to build data integrations that bring CAS application data into on-campus systems. He comes to Liaison by way of Drexel University in Philadelphia, where he worked in enterprise software implementation and data analysis. At Drexel, Greg built automated data integrations between several health professions CASs and the systems on campus.



**MOLLY MCCRACKEN**  
Marketing Consultant, Kira Talent

Molly writes on higher education admissions on behalf of Kira Talent in Toronto, Canada.



**TANDILYN MORREL**  
Director of Graduate Programs, College of Engineering, Texas A&M University

Along with serving as the Director of Graduate Programs for Texas A&M University's College of Engineering, Tandilyn also serves in an advisory capacity for 14 graduate engineering programs with a total of approximately 1,300 students from diverse populations.



**MANDY NAU**  
Executive Director, Health Professions Week

For over 20 years, Mandy has contributed to the development of outreach strategies and tactics for undergraduate, technical and professional programs. She is a skilled communication and recruitment strategist with over 15 years of experience in graduate and medical admissions and recruitment.



**SASHA PETERSON**  
CEO, TargetX

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



**JENNIFER RAAB**  
Learning Experience Designer, Liaison Academy

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



**JOHN TIERNEY**  
Director of Partnerships, SlideRoom

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

The **ADMISSIONIST**  
by LIAISON

FALL 2020  
ISSUE #10

## PUBLISHER

LIAISON INTERNATIONAL

## EDITORIAL TEAM

LAURA NICOLE MILLER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
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