

THE VALUE OF CERTIFICATION: ADMISSIONS LEADERS AND COUNSELORS

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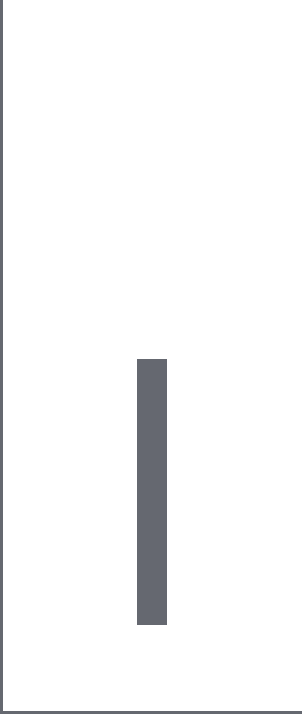
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Certification validates that a level of performance or competency has been attained. A certified Admissions leader or counselor has been observed and measured while performing acknowledged Admissions best practices and processes as they represent the value of attending an institution.





WELCOME



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Certification programs are a part of many professions where certain skills and competencies are required for practitioners to be effective and successful. Engineers, for example, can get certifications in a wide range of core and advanced specializations.

Admissions leaders and counselors who have been certified are considered a value-added component to their institution's offerings.

From an institution's perspective perhaps the most valued aspect of having members of their Admissions team certified is the level of trust and confidence it creates in the minds of prospective students and those influencing their decision. Research from the Stanford Research Institute says that over 80% of purchases occur because of the trust and confidence prospects have in the people representing and the organization that provides the product/service.

**For this and other reasons, we believe it's time to
certify Admissions leaders and counselors.**

This e-book presents the concept of certifying admissions counselors as a means of:

1. Improving counselor yield
2. Providing an institution assurance that their admissions team represents them consistently with a high degree of professionalism, ethics, and integrity
3. Most importantly, communicating the value of an institution, its degree programs and offerings to prospective students and those influencing their decisions.

First, let's look at what's at stake. Then we'll look at how certifying Admissions professionals goes beyond traditional sales training or cobbled-together content from various sources. Third, we'll consider approaches to the Admissions certification process and its potential impact on leaders, counselors, and the institutions they represent along with the prospective student and their constituent's experience. Lastly, we'll evaluate what's important to look for in an Admissions certification program and provider.

1

SECTION 1

WHAT'S AT STAKE



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The recent succession of national and global recessions, natural disasters, inflation, and an economy-crippling pandemic has left many small and mid-size universities and college Admissions and marketing budgets with little room to fund important revenue-producing initiatives. However, history has proven that an investment in Admissions and marketing during recessionary and/or recovery times can—at worst—sustain an institution and—at best—help them exceed their enrollment expectations.

Our experience after working with enrollment teams for over a decade concludes there are 5 key initiatives that Enrollment Leaders can invest in to improve their admissions counselor yields:

1. Implement a proven, predictable, and unified marketing and admissions process.
2. Create a value messaging knowledge base for what differentiates their institution, degree programs, and offerings.
3. Implement team motivational incentives.
4. Measure and improve individual counselor's matriculation rates.
5. Create and establish a coaching and reinforcement methodology that instills and motivates a *continuous practice* in addition to a campus-wide *continuous learning culture*.

WHAT'S MISSING?

In our work with Higher Education institutions, we have found that most universities and colleges do not have a formal or dynamic enrollment methodology or process that's followed inside or outside the Admissions Department. Therefore, it's understandable why counselors are often left to learn by osmosis or shadowing their more experienced peers. And it further explains why most institutions have little, if any, onboarding process for new counselors. This absence of a clear enrollment process combined with a formal, confidence-building onboarding and training program can lead to a demotivated mindset and attitude in the new hire. Unfortunately, many institutions miss this window of opportunity to create a great first impression with new counselors that they hope to nurture and retain for more than the average 2 to 3 years.

Additionally, when there's no defined and established foundational enrollment process there are often few, if any, standard or established best practices to reinforce and coach a counselor to higher proficiency levels. Another challenge is that even if there were established best practices, most enrollment leaders don't have the time to create and schedule personalized coaching sessions.

So what's missing is a clearly defined, proven, predictable, higher ed-specific enrollment methodology that motivates and inspires new counselors to excel in their new roles. Our experience shows that new counselors will ramp up and gain traction in their new job in half the time it takes in an environment without it.

The certification of an admissions counselor trained in a collection of enrollment best practices and processes allows leaders to measure and improve individual counselor's yield rates and as a result, increase tuition revenues. Then, after their initial training, counselors should have periodic reinforcement with refreshers and personalized coaching until the best practices/processes become a part of their muscle memory. At that point, the counselor has moved from "continuous learning and knowing" to "continuous practice and doing."

WHAT'S MISSING?

Perhaps most missing in today's colleges and universities is a person whose responsibility is to oversee and administer training and enablement of all prospective student-facing personnel. Some would call them a "point-person." This point person is ideally someone who is a proactive, self-starter with successful admissions counseling experience and could be a career admissions leader if they saw career advancement in their future. Depending upon the size of an institution this could be a Director of Admissions, VP of Enrollment, or as stated above, a seasoned, successful counselor who has a gift to lead, teach, motivate, and encourage. Once Certified as a Facilitator and Coach, this person serves as an in-house expert, working shoulder-to-shoulder with all prospective student-facing personnel. An investment in this person and their role will easily pay for itself in less than twelve months.

With today's enrollment challenges, it takes the whole campus to recruit and retain students. It's everybody's job. Admissions does the heavy lifting, however, everyone has a part to play.

2

SECTION 2

IF ITS BROKEN—FIX IT!



IF IT'S BROKEN—FIX IT!

All too often, the need to “do something to improve enrollment” results in a one-time consulting or training event. Despite poor results from the past, some institutions spend significant dollars to bring in a high-priced consultant to research and produce a report/plan. Then, it falls to the institution to implement and sustain it. On average, the cost for this kind of engagement can easily exceed \$5K to \$9K per counselor, after all the costs are calculated. As stated earlier, after all the time and money has been spent the results are often short-lived with little to no tracking, reporting, reinforcement, and follow-up to these training sessions.

What's missing from these expensive initiatives is retention, utilization, and performance appraisals of the new training content/processes.

Another weakness in the typical training program or event is the quality of the content, specifically the curriculum. Often, it contains dated sales tips and techniques from an industry sector very different than higher education which is not consistent with the culture or ethos of higher education. Instead of receiving interactive personal instruction, affirmation, and reinforcement from a live person, counselors interact with poor or highly produced digitized animations more likely to leave them entertained than trained. This less-than-effective digital learning reduces retention to less than 25% of what's presented. And when retention drops so does utilization.

Today, many institutions are saying “Enough!” to this failed approach and are looking for something different and effective. They're aware that the previous consulting and/or training results have not measured up and that it's time for a change—something that provides a better return on their training investment.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

For an enrollment-increasing initiative to work, decision-makers who commit to funding the engagement need to see measurable and sustained increases in yield and matriculation efficiencies. In other words, an initiative should have goals set at the beginning of the engagement and be achieved. Measuring pre- and post-initiative enrollment stage conversion performance levels for each counselor is an effective means of revealing counselor strengths and weaknesses that can direct personalized coaching to improve their funnel performance.

Repeatability and sustainability should be a component of an enrollment-increasing initiative and represent another way Presidents, CFOs, and enrollment leaders can track continuous improvement. Ideally, the improvement should last at least two consecutive enrollment cycles and not just occur immediately after the initiative and then fizzle.

- Comparisons should be made of pre- and post-initiative inquiry-to-enrolled ratios for each counselor.
- Comparisons should be made of pre- and post-initiative counselor yield. This data can be used to hold Admissions team members accountable for qualitative and quantitative improvements validated by enrollment cycle advances and funnel conversion rates.
- Assessing the stage-to-stage conversion rates of each counselor will indicate their best practices/processes strengths and weaknesses, which serve to guide improvement coaching by their leader.

There are other metrics to measure and track but these are three important ones that demonstrate efficiencies, effectiveness, and the ROI of a training/certification initiative's success or failure.

Enrollment improvement sustainability requires reinforcement.

Value-based best practice/process adoption and utilization rates rise when reinforcements such as individualized coaching and role-playing sessions are interspersed with training and deployed over several months. This type of reinforced program produces sustained and measurable results for an institution.

SOLUTION: CERTIFICATION



Certification implies that a level of performance or competency has been attained. A certified Admissions leader or counselor has been observed and measured while performing acknowledged Admissions best practices and processes as they represent the value of attending their institution.

Our experience shows that new Admissions Counselors trained in a proven and predictable Admissions process will reach goal-level expectation levels in half the normal time.

The outcome and success of a certification initiative are most determined by admissions leadership. How it's presented and incented is important. We believe that savvy team leaders will challenge their new hires, experienced counselors, and seasoned veterans to commit to a certification training program to ensure the probability of their success but also as a career-enhancing and challenging opportunity.

For the most part, we've found that most counselors, regardless of age or experience, are looking for, and even expecting, some form of onboarding and continued training for their job. Additionally, a job that offers professional development along with career and resume-enhancing opportunities not only attracts but also retains team members. The opportunity to achieve a level of knowledge and execution of a collection of admissions best practices and processes is energizing to a team.

SOLUTION (CONTINUED)

An Admissions Leader and Counselor Certification initiative will produce outcomes that affect the entire campus, specifically through:

Improved Performance – Increase in Yield & Tuition Revenue

- Equipping and training your Admissions staff and other departmental, prospective student-facing personnel will improve your institution's net tuition revenue by achieving your matriculation, enrollment, and retention rates and goals.
- Behavioral change that emphasizes the execution of Admissions best practices/processes will move prospective student-facing personnel from "knowing about" to "being able to execute" them.

Universally Adopted, Optimized Enrollment Processes & Messaging

- Integrating consultative, value-based, admissions best practices/processes will optimize your current recruitment/enrollment process.
- Establishing a proven, standard, universally adopted enrollment process campus-wide will optimize yield.
- Periodic refresher, coaching, and personalized training will achieve year-over-year enrollment improvement.
- Creation, and universal use, of value propositions and consistent value-based messaging will communicate your institution's and department's uniqueness.

Providing Measurable Year-Over-Year Enrollment Growth

- Training, equipping, and certifying an Admissions Leader as an in-house expert will reinforce best practices and establish coaching for all prospective student-facing personnel.
- Measuring, tracking, reporting, and celebrating enrollment successes within Admissions and across campus will increase accountability and morale.
- Establishing enrollment KPIs, goals and milestones to track, measure, and compare counselor and territory performance will increase yield.

SUMMARY

In today's competitive landscape, enrollment leaders must consider all alternatives to reach their enrollment goals. Absent or traditional training initiatives have not produced sustained results, yet institutions, perhaps out of not knowing what else to do, continue to throw good money after bad.

With millions of dollars spent on training initiatives globally, there's still room for improvement. A well-designed certification program customized to an institution's values, value offerings, and differentiators can produce the sustained enrollment increases that institutions need.

A certification program administered by highly skilled former admissions and sales executives with "been there, done that" track records will impart professional, proven, and predictable performance levels that achieve admissions goals.

So, is it time to certify your Admissions team? We say yes.

WHO IS VALUE BASED?

We've worked with 35 colleges and universities for over 10 years in addition to several decades in other sectors representing over 5,500 sales professionals. We are able to engage admissions professionals of all experience levels in a challenging, fun, and stimulating adult learning experience. Best of all, the institution, Admissions leaders, and counselors who invest in completing the certification program have the potential to see measurable and sustained results beyond their previous experience.

If you'd like to learn more about these practices and the Value Based Enrollment Methodology Certification please contact us at:



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