

Using Data to Fine-Tune the Admission Process at Clarkson University

Catherine Stover

As an engineer, Brian Grant likes numbers. In his current position as director of admissions at his alma mater, Clarkson University, he analyzes the data associated with prospects, applications, admissions, and graduates. While his institution has always had a very strong yield after students applied, Grant wondered how he could increase the size, quality, and diversity of his prospects.

Like many admissions directors, he did not have the option of simply increasing the size of his budget. Instead, his challenge was to increase the impact of his budget by being more efficient and more strategic. Like virtually all admissions directors, he was looking for cost-effective ways to improve the admissions process.

Clarkson University has a 100-year-old campus that is home to about 3,000 students, located in Potsdam, New York (population 15,000). Half of its students are in the Wallace H. Coulter School of Engineering, a flagship of the institution. Grant says, "It takes the right kind of student to come to a small-town school with a prominent focus on using technology to bridge discovery, innovation and enterprise across all of its 50+ rigorous academic programs in engineering, business, arts and sciences, and health sciences."

He says that the students who are most likely to be successful at Clarkson are students who were leaders in student government in high school, are academically gifted, and want to be active learners. "A student who likes to sit in the last row in class is not likely to be a good fit," he observes.

Getting information from data

But simply knowing this — and a score of statistics from the applications — was not enough. "I had the data but not the information I needed to fine-tune our efforts," he says.

Grant believes that his office has the right infrastructure, is very productive, does a lot of things right — but is very busy. Working with the University's marketing department, they knew they had the right message strategy, but were they reaching all of the prospects they should? Every year, they would tweak their efforts, but one year would roll quickly into the next. Pooling Admission resources with Marketing's dollars, Clarkson sought an outside perspective to learn more about who represented their search process. Previously, his office had worked with Maguire Associates on financial aid leveraging, and after a few phone calls and meetings, a reverse-engineering analysis of their applicant pool began.

Clarkson University's goals included the following:

- Attracting a larger, stronger and more diverse applicant pool
- Aligning their recruitment efforts to cast a targeted, focused recruitment net
- Receiving more market intelligence up front — at the beginning of the process — so they could most effectively use their resources to recruit the "best-fit" students

Developing a customized statistical model

Rather than purchasing a software system or adding staff, Clarkson chose a customized method or a model that would translate his data into more useful information to be used comprehensively across the institution that would help Grant's admission efforts immediately, but would also feed into Clarkson's long-range planning process and institutional marketing initiatives. Maguire's senior consultants Sarah Parrott and Jonathon Epstein collected three years of admissions records — from prospects through enrollments — and statistically analyzed the results.

They then added available third-party

data to the mix, using College Board's Descriptor Plus and the National Student Clearing house's Student Tracker service. They found that that data combination clearly uncovered the characteristics of students who applied and enrolled at Clarkson. The data also showed the statistical "fence-sitters," and (statically speaking) long shots.

Knowing this, Clarkson could target its message when communicating with lists of students who were most likely to apply, and they could communicate in a different way with fence-sitters and long-shots. This information could shape decisions about which prospects should receive its most expensive view books and which should receive less expensive materials.

As Sarah Parrott notes, "Some schools will send \$10 view books to 100,000 prospects, even though they know that perhaps only 10,000 of those students will be interested. If you alter that one mailing based on solid information about your pool, you can make your money work better for you."

Using the market intelligence

Now, based on a rigorous statistical formula, the admissions office at Clarkson knows whether a prospective student is a "hot prospect" or a "long shot" from the very beginning of the recruitment process. This innovative market intelligence allows the admission office to tailor its response to optimize the investment.

This information also informs list buys of prospective student names. Clarkson no longer, for example, purchases lists based solely on test scores, GPA, majors and state. Now, their lists are much more targeted.

It is too early to tell what the results of this effort will be. However, alterations made in the financial aid leveraging two years previously have already increased the diversity and doubled the

➤ *continued on page 5*

▼ Data from page 4

number of women enrolled in this technology-oriented campus. Grant is optimistic that the current admission cycle will produce students who are most like-

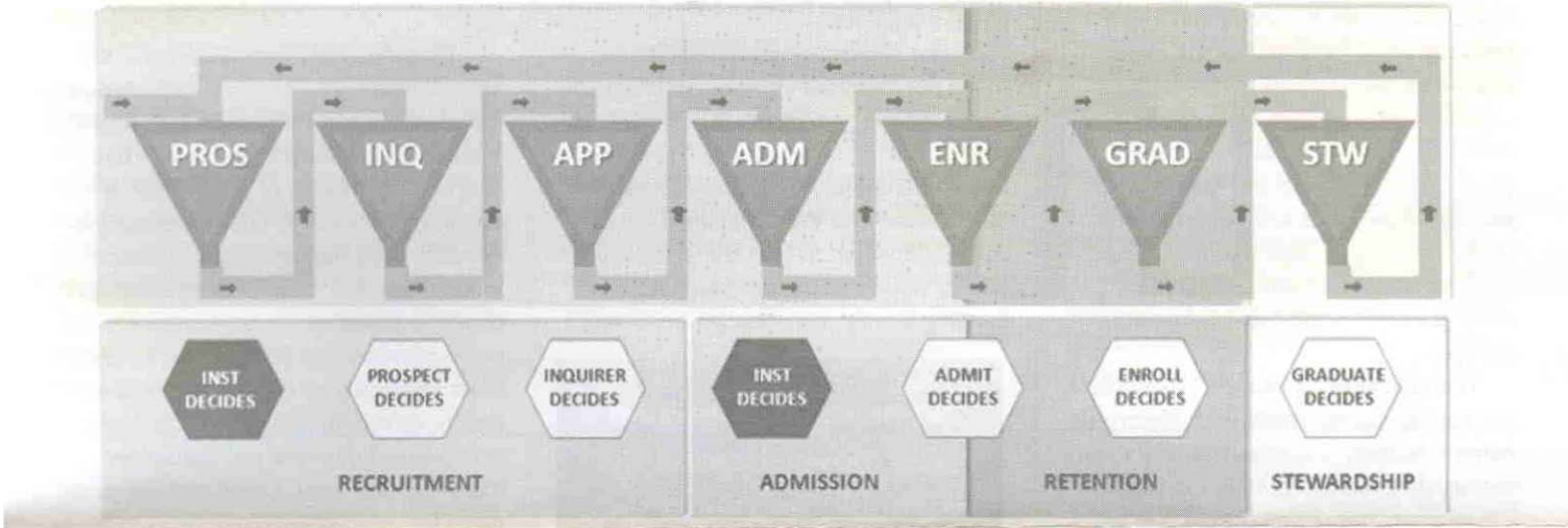
ly to get the most out of their experience at Clarkson University.

To learn more about Clarkson University, go to www.clarkson.edu. To learn more about Maguire Associates' new service — called EMPOWR — go to

www.maguireassoc.com/.

Catherine Stover is the editor of Recruitment & Retention. Her email address is Catherine.stover@magnapubs.com. ✓

Maguire Associates' Enrollment Management Concept



The diagram above represents our most current thinking about the evolution of enrollment management. In contrast with the conventional enrollment funnel that ends when a student enrolls, the decision points in the relationship between an institution and the student are depicted as a series of funnels that encompass a student's entire higher education lifecycle. Instead of thinking about the process in terms of a single vertical funnel where students fall, by chance, through different levels and land at the bottom as enrolled students, consider each major decision point in the entire educational lifespan as an individual fun-

nel through which a student may or may not pass.

Most will start at the very beginning as prospects. Some will then choose to become inquirers. Some inquirers will choose to become applicants. A vast majority will choose not to pass through the very first funnel. Others will introduce themselves into the system without being part of a preceding funnel, such as a student who applies for admission without any previous contact or a generous donor never before associated with the institution. At other points in the cycle, it is impossible to appear without being present in a previous funnel (stu-

dents cannot be admitted to the institution without applying first and cannot enroll without being admitted, etc.).

To effectively serve and manage the entire higher education lifecycle, we must recognize that each step along the way requires an active decision, requiring deliberate forward momentum to reach the next. And as such, it is incumbent upon the institution to serve the students well and address their needs so that they will continue to move through each funnel and continue their active relationship with the institution. ✓

— Used with permission from Maguire Associates.