HOW SOME COLLEGES CHASE PROSPECTIVE ADULT STUDENTS AWAY & HOW TO AVOID IT

dws | associates

Written by Pat McGraw and Dudley Stevenson

CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

You have, they say, just one chance to make a positive first impression. And when it comes to recruiting adult students to your Degree Completion and/or Graduate programs, that first impression has a significant impact on your ability to achieve your enrollment goals.

What follows are examples of what works at various stages of the recruitment process…and what are signs of an institution and/or program that's struggling to achieve its goals.

We end this document with recommendations on what you can do to deliver a more positive first impression – and we share a simple technique you can use to determine if the investment will pay for itself in an acceptable time frame.

Finally, as always, if you have questions as you go through this document, feel free to contact us. We're always happy to answer your questions – and we'll use the opportunity to make improvements to the document based on your input. You can reach us at info@dwsassociates.com or 651-315-7588

SPECIAL NOTE

Oh, and when we mention "Request for Information" forms, we are referring to those forms a prospective student would use to obtain program information – we're not talking about information about season tickets to any of your sports teams or your theater series.

The Adult student needs fast, easy access to the accurate, relevant information whenever they want it.

Our job is to make that happen – but sometimes we don’t.

YOUR WEBSITE

Too many websites are created for too many different audiences which results in a jumbled mess. Add your own jargon to the mix and we quickly see websites designed to be 'all things to all people' become 'nothing to anyone'.

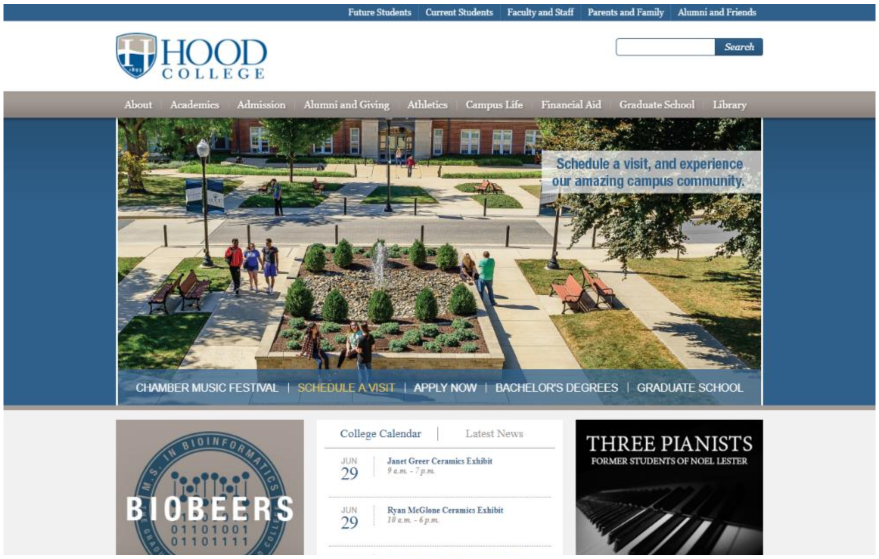
When focused on adult students that are interested in credentials or degree programs, it's important to remember that they are coming to gather information in those early stages of their decision-making process. So focus on what they want and need now and don't get too far ahead of yourself.

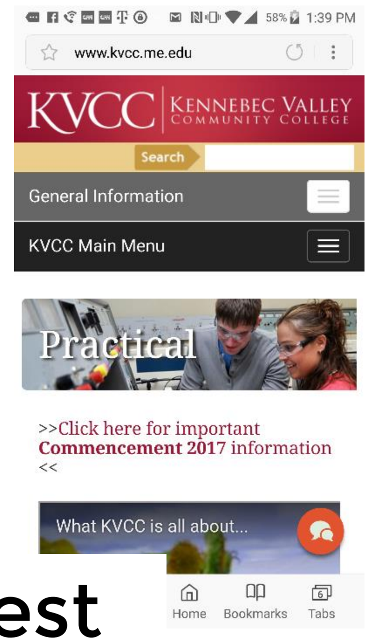
Later, they may look for the online application – but in the early stages it's more about basic data points.

Do you have the program I want? If not, do you have something comparable? How much will it cost? How long will it take?

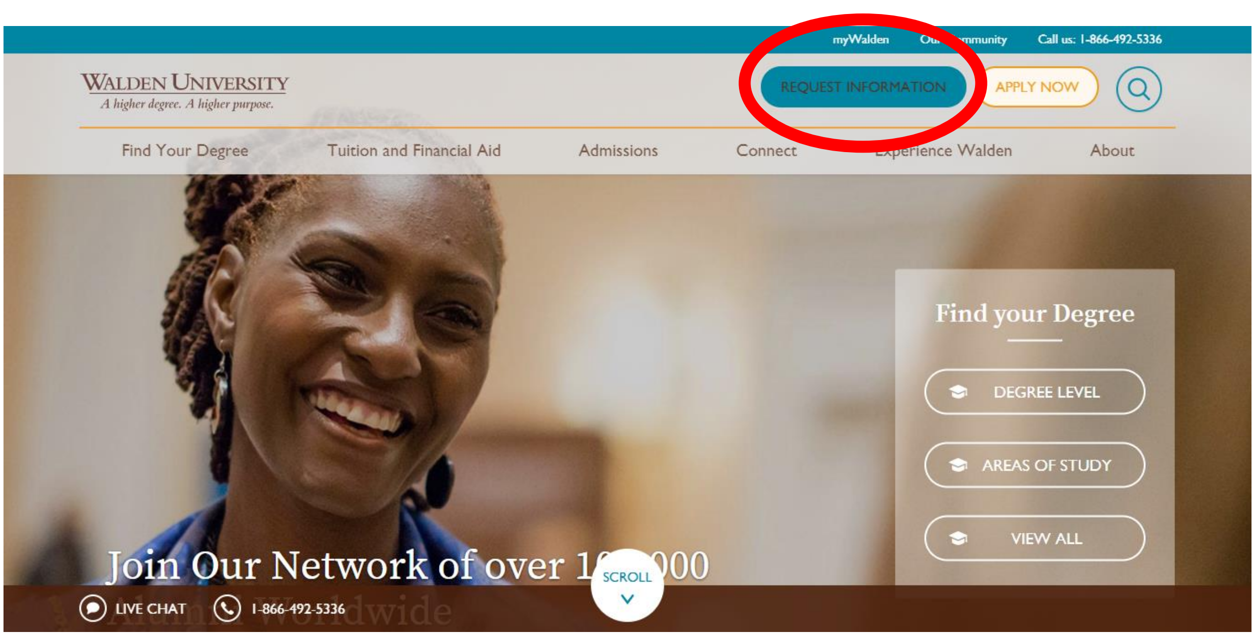
Some will visit and call for what they can't find. Others will visit and stop by campus for what they can't find. This is for those that visit and want you to send them what they cannot find.

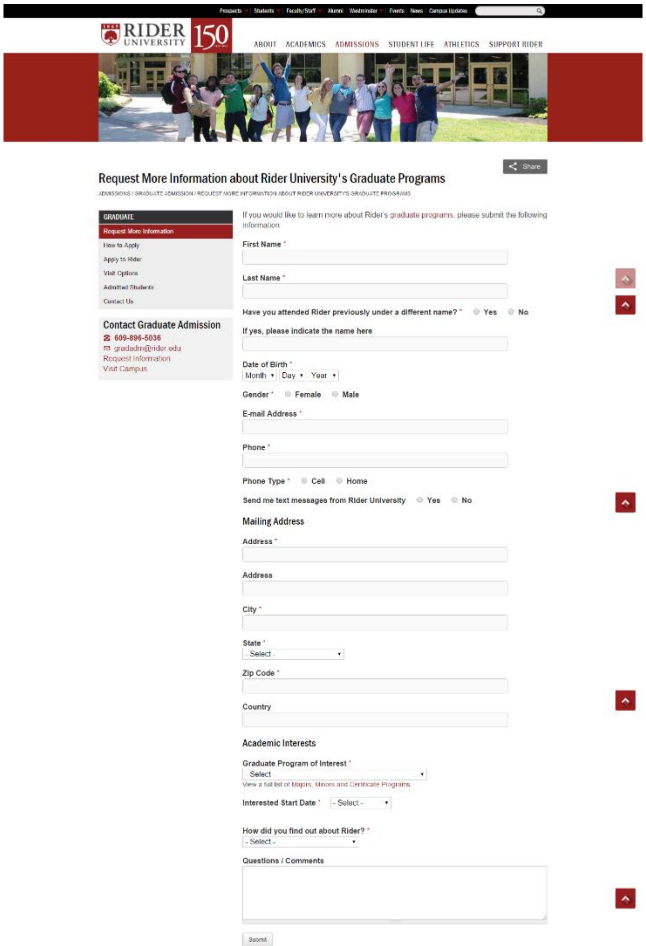
Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
Your website has on its home page content that is for adult students – images that show students 25-years-of-age or older and copy/benefits that are relevant to that audience. Your website has clearly defined messages, offers and design/appearance for adults on relevant sections – for example, Degree Completion and Graduate programs are built for the adult student. This may mean, depending on your audience wants, needs, expectations, different ways of presenting information than how you present similar information to traditional/undergraduates. Your website has "Request Information" form on every page OR a link to a form that can easily be found in the same spot on every page in the site so visitors can find it quickly and easily. You have tested your site design on multiple mobile devices as well as desktop monitors so you know "Request Information" is easy to find.	Your website's home page is filled with 18 to 24-year-olds leisurely walking across campus or participating in clubs, athletics etc. and all imagery and copy is geared towards traditional students. Everything on the site screams "Only our faculty and staff are over 30 years of age!" There is no way to request information on your site – or, no visible link to a form to request information or even mention of a toll-free number to call. There are request info forms and/or links to request info forms sprinkled randomly throughout the site – not making it easy to find for your visitors but giving them a "Treasure Hunt" experience combined with that sensation of "winning" when they find them. Your site offers easier access to "Donate" and/or "Apply Now" than "Request Information". (You want a $25 donation or $25,000 in tuition?)

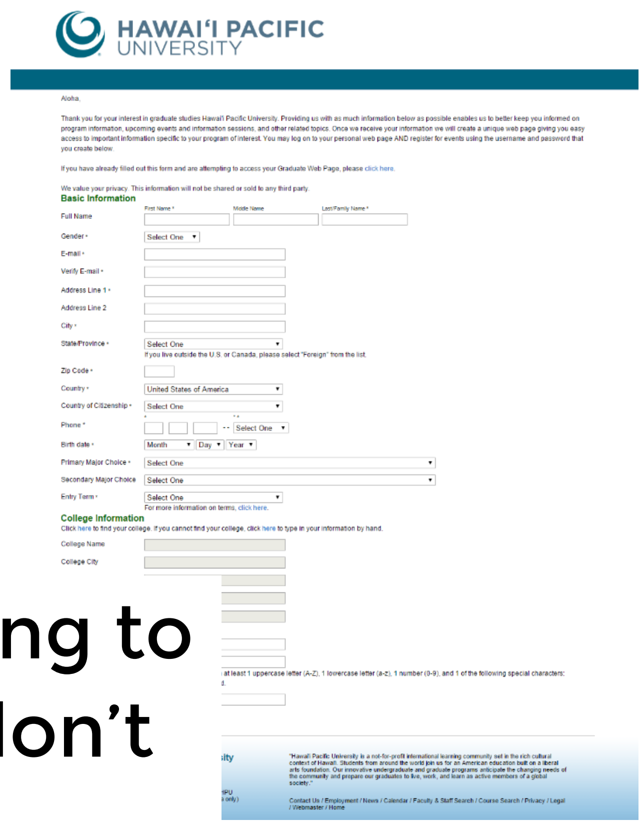




Can you find the ‘Request Information’ link or form on either Home Page?







If you aren't going to use the data – don't ask for it!

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FORM

In that early stage, you want to get what you need – what you will use now – and move on. Asking for too much information at this stage is going to suppress your completed form submission rate.

We recommend keeping it to:

- First Name
- Last Name
- Email
- Program of Interest
- Desired Start Date

If you ask for 'Phone' make sure you ask for 'Mobile Phone' and then ask for permission to send occasional text messages.

If you serve the 'US Military' and/or 'International Students', have unique forms for them because you need more information.

But beyond the above, wait to ask for other data.

Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
A "Request Information" form is limited to first name, last name, email address, program of interest and desired start date. If you ask for "Phone", it's "Mobile Phone" and with it you ask them to opt-in for text messages. If you serve a substantial number of "International" and/or "Military" students, you have a unique form for them so you capture the key information and start them down the proper path for nurturing. You have designed the form with mobile devices in mind – limiting the number of questions/data fields.	One form for all purposes – including but not limited to undergraduates, graduates, businesses, faculty and staff and more – resulting in 15+ data fields on a confusing, long form! And all fields are required. And some fields are in your own jargon, which means the respondent has now idea what you're asking for…but the field is required so you get garbage data!! A form that asks for information you will never use like Birth Date, Parent's email, Year Graduated from High School, etc. – and they are required! You have never even thought about looking at the form on a mobile device.

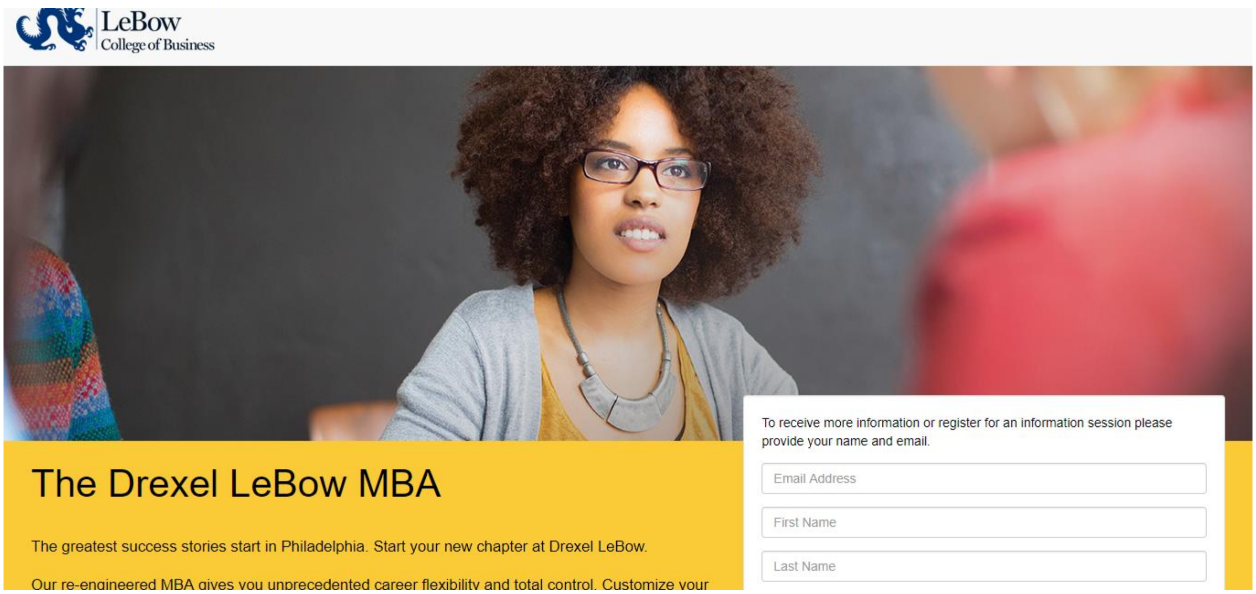
LANDING PAGES

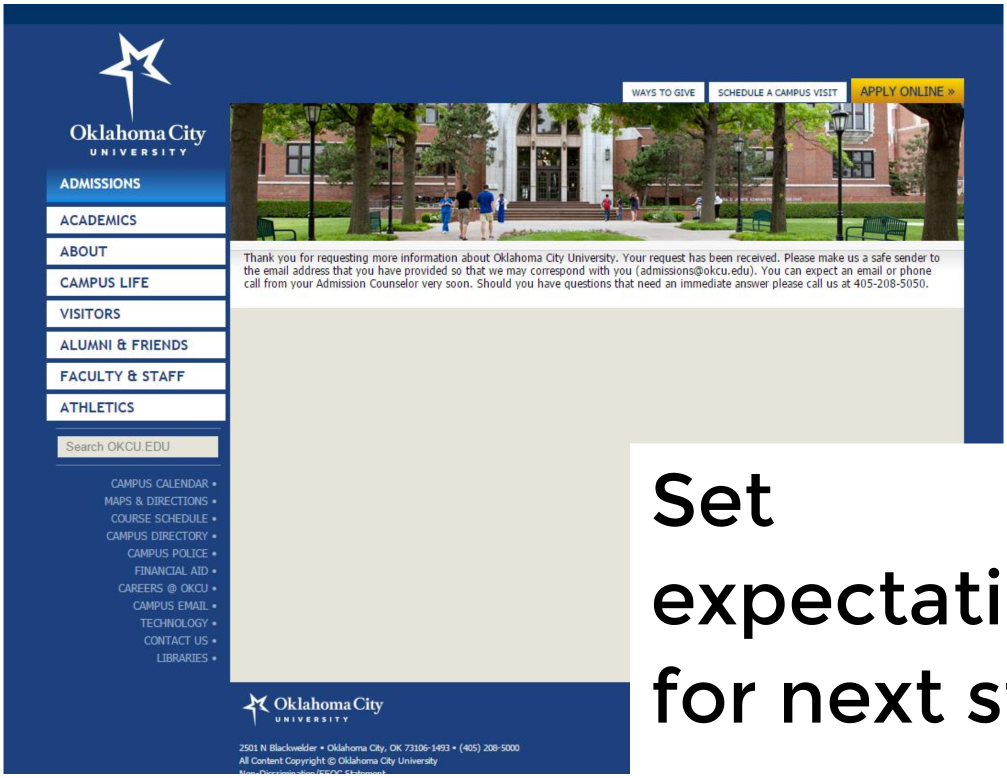
Remember that at this stage of the decision-making process, the prospective adult student is looking for reasons to select one institution and program over another – so here is your chance to tell them about "WIIFM" which is also known as "What's in it for me!"

None of this "21-week program" or "…our staff and faculty are dedicated to your success…" Instead, focus on how you will save them time, money, energy, sanity. Or how you will help them achieve their goal which might be to minimize debt or balance work-home-school or get that promotion!

Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
Your landing pages are stand alone, unique destinations that are filled with benefit rich content that is relevant to the visitor. Your landing pages have strong offers that provide the visitor with the information they need now to make an informed decision regarding whether to move forward with your institution in their selection process Your landing pages offers visitors multiple ways to respond and contact you beyond the web form – unique email, phone numbers etc. – that allow you to track performance of the landing page. You are constantly testing landing form for ways to improve performance. You design the landing page for desktop/laptop/mobile devices.	You have no landing page so you send people to your site's home page so you can't track them or the impact your campaign made beyond "clicks". Your landing page is designed to support more than one program so it has a great deal of content. You are using the same landing page for 5+ years because there's no time to test or create a new one and this one works just fine. Your landing page hasn't been viewed on a mobile device.

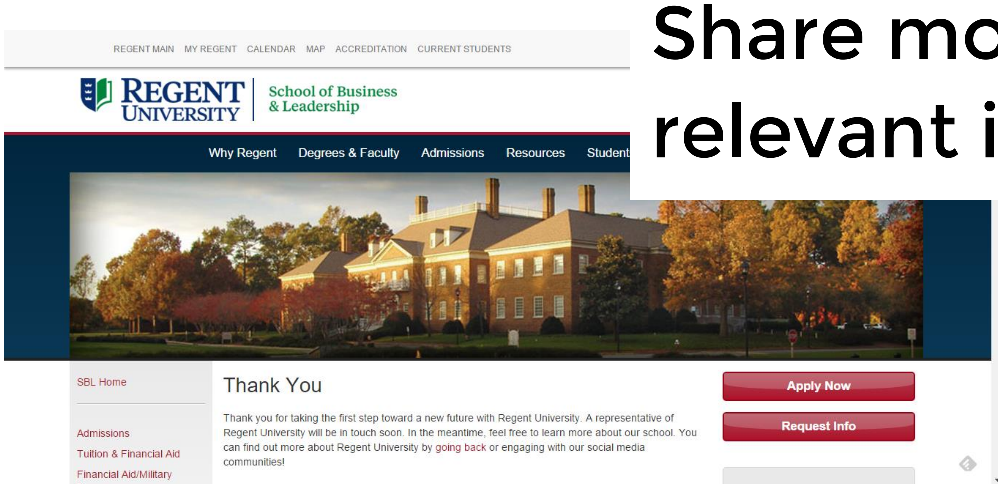
Focused on a single program – not a 'Information Request' form for everything you offer





Set expectations for next steps.

Share more relevant info!



THANK YOU PAGE

Probably one of the most overlooked tools you have – the ‘Thank you’ page can be used for so many more things than a simple ‘Thank you’.

Best-in-class will use this opportunity to confirm the data submitted, explain next steps so expectations are clearly understood, offer links to additional information that is relevant to the prospective student based on what is known and even introduce the assigned enrollment/advising team member(s) that will be working with them. (Include the contact information for the assigned enrollment/advising team member and, if you can, a photo because that brings in the human touch which is important to building trusting relationships that lead to enrollments.

Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
After completing the form and clicking “Submit”, prospective students are taken to a “Thank You” page that confirms what they submitted and sets expectations for next steps. Ideally, the page includes additional content specific to the data submitted – say, for example, a video from the program chair or a member of the program’s faculty. Ideally, the page includes the name and contact information for the person in enrollment that will work with the prospective student.	You have a “Thank you” page that says “Thank you” – and that’s it. You have “Thank you” page that offers very vague content like “…someone will get in touch with you soon…” You have a “Thank you” page that hasn’t been reviewed or updated in the past 90-days so it has dated content and broken links.

AUTO-EMAIL

We have come to expect some type of immediate follow up after we have completed a form and submitted it to any organization, government agency, NGO etc.

So why do so may colleges fail to follow up the submission of information with an email?

Best-in-class institutions have a rather simple process. Once the prospective student clicks "Submit", and the prospective student is redirected to the 'Thank you' page, a set of business rules are run that use the data supplied to create a personalized email AND the data is assigned to an enrollment/advisor for follow up. (In some institutions, that means the prospective student would [a] click the 'Submit' button, [b] be redirected to the 'Thank you' page, [c] receive a personalized automated email and [d] receive a phone call from their assigned enrollment/advisor all with about 10 minutes – 30 minutes on the outside.

Is that type of speed to response necessary? We've seen research point both ways – but to be honest, the point here is that the auto-email can be a fantastic way to move the relationship with the prospective adult student forward when properly used.

Again, set clear expectations about next steps. Introduce that enrollment/advisor. Share additional information that's relevant based on what's been shared.

Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
After completing the web form and clicking "Submit", an auto email is created with the data submitted and sent to the prospective student as quickly as possible – typically under 30-minutes The auto email is personalized with the data from the web form and contains new relevant information about the program of interest. The auto email explains that the next step is exchanging a little more information so that you (the institution) can be sure to share relevant information with them – saving them time and their sanity! The auto email has a clear offer that requires the individual to do something so you can track that effort and use it to qualify and prioritize them for more effective and efficient management and nurturing.[1]	You have no automated email. You have an automated email that uses NONE of the data shared on the web form so it reads "Dear Friend" and references the "…100+ undergraduate and graduate certificate and degree programs offered…" You haven't reviewed the email in more than 90-days and it's filled with incorrect information and broken links.

[1] Two people submit a web form expressing interest in Program A. Within 24 hours, only one clicks on the link to the offer in the auto email. That person is more engaged than the other and will receive an immediate outreach in response to their action – the other person will be given another 24 hours before they receive another email

More

Regent University: MBA Program Inbox x

sbladmissions@regent.edu 2:44 PM (5 minutes ago)
to patmcgraw

Hello Pat,

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at Regent University's School of Business & Leadership. The Regent MBA is a unique and challenging program that is extremely rewarding for those who seek to impact their organizations. The majority of our students are working and typically make immediate application of the material to their place of work. Our students currently represent professions in nearly every industry including education, government, military, faith-based ministry, corporate business and non-profit.

PROGRAM DETAILS

- 42 credit-hour program
- 12 majors to choose from:
  - Accounting
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Finance & Investing
  - Franchising
  - General Management
  - Healthcare Management
  - Human Resources Management
  - International Business
  - Innovation Management
  - Leadership
  - Marketing
  - Not for Profit Management
- Offered online or on-campus, full or part-time
- Incorporates a biblical perspective and global leadership applications

Frequently asked questions are:
Admissions Requirements & Deadlines
Tuition & Financial Aid
Faculty Profiles

Pat, it is our desire to be of assistance to you while exploring your options for a graduate degree program, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you have. Also, please consider joining us for an online, on-campus, or regional Info Session where you will gain in-depth knowledge of our programs and interact with faculty. Event times and registration details can be found here.

We look forward to connecting with you soon!

Sincerely,

Heidi Cece
Executive Director of University Admissions
Regent University

757.352.4400

sbladmissions@regent.edu
Regent University. Christian Leadership to Change the World.

To unsubscribe from any future emails, please click here.

Thank you for your interest in Saint Martin's University Inbox x

Saint Martin's University Admissions admissions@stmartin.edu 10:40 AM (17 minutes ago)
to patmcgraw

Dear Pat,

Thank you for your interest in Saint Martin's University! One of the best ways to learn more about our community is to visit campus--we offer everything from daily tours to Open Houses, classroom visits, and even overnight stays with a current student! Find out more by going to www.stmartin.edu/visit. We'll be sure to send you some information in the mail, but please don't hesitate to call us at 800-368-8803 or 360-438-4596, or send us a text at 562-656-2768. We are excited to learn more about you, and can't wait to show you what makes being a "Saint" special.

Your Admissions staff

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When asked about your MBA or MAT, responding with information on anything but your MBA or MAT makes a poor first impression.


Master of Arts in Education

The Master of Arts in Education (MAED) is uniquely designed to advance the professional knowledge, effectiveness and skills of educators in P–16, Christian, corporate, career and technical, youth, adult and other contexts. This non-licensure master's degree is appropriate for both experienced and inexperienced educators and will enhance professional practice through advanced study in teaching and learning. The MAED program includes ten online courses with scaffolded instruction leading to a capstone research project.

Highlights

- Emphasis on a biblical worldview to inform learning, instruction, research and reflection in multiple contexts and diverse communities
- A variety of specialty areas that provide choice and relevance for your academic interests and career goals
- Continuous-cohort model
- Scaffolded approach to learning
- Carefully structured sequence of course assignments leading to depth of understanding and application across the program
- Emphasis on integration of advanced study that leads to inspired teaching, learning and spiritual growth
- Flexible online format for timely program completion and attainment of your goals
- Strong community to support you in the online learning environment

Graduate Studies

Contact us

unwsp.edu/gradstudies
651-631-5200 | 888-362-8715
gradstudies@unwsp.edu

Best-in-Class use the media their audience prefers – those that struggle over-rely on email because of cost, manpower.

LEAD MANAGEMENT PROCESS

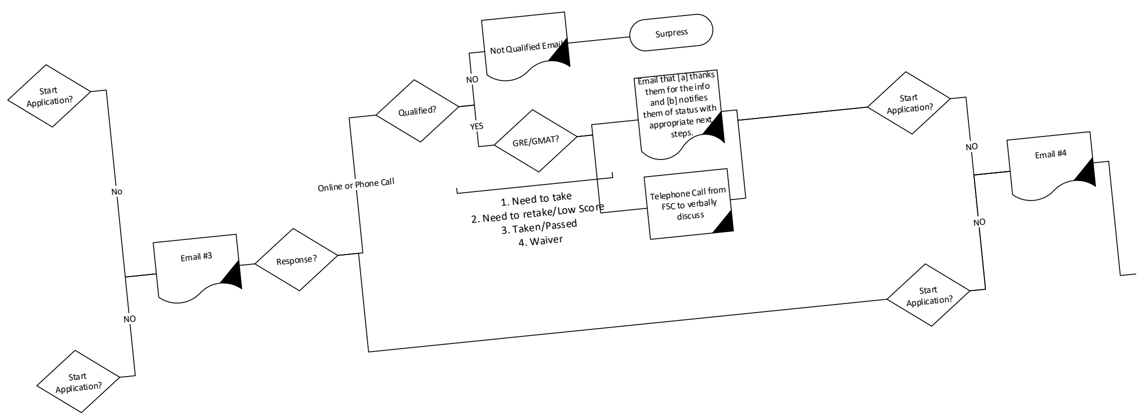
Some will apply right away. Others will never apply. And then there are those that apply with help from you.

Best-in-class have an efficient process in place that leverages their resources and ensures that the prospective adult student receives the right message and offer via the right media at the right time so they move forward in their process with you.

They also ask questions and gather information that helps them qualify and prioritize the prospective adult student which allows them to better manage the relationship with their resources.

Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
You have an automated process that takes data submitted via web forms and runs it through specific business rules that determine who on your enrollment team is assigned the new lead. That enrollment team member is notified immediately of the new inquiry and is trained to respond to the new inquiry – usually within one hour. The enrollment team member is trained to use this first contact to address specific issues that help you qualify and prioritize the lead as well as to identify the prospective student's selection criteria and decision-making process because that impacts your message, offer, media and contact strategies associated with nurturing/enrollment .	You have a manual process that is undocumented, with no one accountable for ensuring that new inquiries are assigned to anyone within a specific time frame – it happens when you have the time and it's low on the priority list. Once assigned to a member of the enrollment team, there is no process for next steps – meaning some will call the person right away and others will send an email in a couple of days. There is no process for the enrollment team to follow regarding the objective for each contact – what data to collect to qualify and prioritize the inquiry – so that all inquiries are treated equal which results in inconsistent lead nurturing and prospective student experiences. Your enrollment team calls, asks if the prospective student has questions and then ends the call with "…if I can help, call me" – thereby missing an opportunity to gain information that will help you determine if the individual is qualified to be admitted into your institution/program as well as information that helps you determine their likelihood for success (Are their wants, needs, expectations and perceptions of your program correct?)

Journey Mapping



Ensures the Right Message and Offer Gets to the Right People at the Right Time Via the Right Media for Better Results.

APPLICATION PROCESS

For those prospective students that do start the application process, best-in-class organizations have a process in place for monitoring and reporting progress along with key dates and deadlines so that they prospective student is guided through the process rather than left alone to figure it out on their own.

Remember, prospective adult students aren't as experienced with official transcript requests, FAFSA, and all the other steps required in your process – so help them as best you can rather than assume that "…everyone can figure it out because it's rather simple."

Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
You immediately contact the applicant once they have submitted their application and that message thanks them, and explains next steps and time frame. You immediately notify the applicant once their submission has been reviewed whether all the requirement materials/information was included or if they still have requirements that need to be submitted. You immediately notify the applicant that they were not accepted into their program of choice – and you include options such as enrolling in other programs. .	You have no process for responding to the applicant once they have submitted their application. You only notify those accepted for admission into your institution/program – letting those that were not accepted to wonder, assume or contact you for official notification.

On-boarding to help start off successfully as well as other ways to help the student become part of the college family generates higher retention, graduation and referrals rates.

ON-BOARDING NEW ADULT STUDENTS

Best-in-class institutions have a formal on-boarding process for new adult students that provides them with a hands-on overview of all the features and benefits available to them – ranging from who to call for help (and that's typically one number and one person rather than numbers for each area within the institution) to videos, seminars, workshops that allow the student to hit the ground running rather than getting run over at the start of their first term.

From where to get parking passes and where other adult students hang-out between classes, to how to navigate the SIS and LMS and other technology needed to register, pay, attend.

And then there are those valuable services such as career services or even childcare, if you are providing it.

Best-in-Class	Struggling to Achieve Goals
Once accepted, you have a formal process for working with the new student on accepting the offer and successfully completing next steps that might include formal acceptance, payment of required down payments, registering for classes, ordering materials for classes etc..	Once accepted, you sit back and hope they can figure out how to enroll in classes, order required materials etc. If they call, you do your best to help answer their questions.

MAKING THIS HAPPEN WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Hopefully, as you read through this post, you found yourself being described under the “Best in class” column – but if you happened to find yourself in “that other column”, take a deep breath and relax!!

The first step towards improving effectiveness and efficiency is realizing you have an issue that needs to be addressed.

For a lot of what you see in the list, it’s not about have more resources – be they human, financial or technical – it’s about leveraging what you have and developing a process that allows you to consistently execute.

Step One is know where you are, followed closely by Step Two which is knowing where you want to be. Just be sure that where you want to be is something you can achieve with the resources available, and something that your adult students will value!

Step Three is mapping out what needs to be changed to get from here to there.

Step Four is bringing those changes to life and measuring them in two ways – first, metrics that show you are consistently executing the level of service and support and, second, data that addresses your audience’s perception of your efforts.

Again, as we mentioned earlier in this document, answering the phone in less than 3 rings is pointless if the student views the experience with the person answering the phone to be valuable.

You will most likely need to do some work with the adult student prior to solidifying your vision for where you want to be – they are they recipient of your efforts, so let them help you identify what that effort and outcome should be.

We also suggest getting their input in mapping out the process since it does impact them significantly.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU DON’T HAVE THE EXPERIENCE OR BANDWIDTH TO HANDLE THIS TYPE OF PROJECT?

Keep this in mind whenever you are looking at a project of this nature – what results do you need to achieve to recoup the cost of someone with the experience and bandwidth?

The best way to figure that out is this way…

Average Tuition Rate for Adult Student	$25,000
Profit Generated (%)	25%
Profit Generated ($)	$6,250
Cost of the Expertise/Bandwidth	???
# of Incremental Enrollments Needed to Recoup Investment	

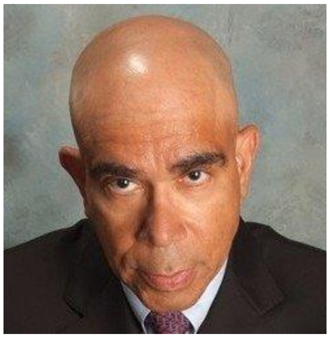
Divide the “Profit Generated ($)” into the “Cost of the Expertise/Bandwidth” and you will see how many incremental enrollments you need to recoup your investment into the expertise/bandwidth. For example, if the “Cost of the Expertise/Bandwidth” was $50,000 – you would need 8 incremental enrollments ($50,000 / $6,250). With this insight, you can decide if your project will pay for itself or not.

ABOUT DWS ASSOCIATES

Founded in 1982, DWS Associates is a full-service marketing firm that develops and implements multi-channel marketing programs for organizations targeting business-to-consumer and business-to-business audiences in global markets. Our focus is on data-driven, innovative lead generation, lead nurturing, retention, and referral programs that attract, engage and retain profitable customers. Our staff is highly experienced in market research, competitive intelligence, business intelligence and analytics, strategic planning and campaign management - so we help you increase sales and marketing performance while building strong, unique, differentiated brands.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

DUDLEY STEVENSON



Dudley Stevenson, founder and CEO of DWS Associates, has over thirty-five years' experience in consumer marketing, business-to-business marketing, and direct marketing, including developing, planning, and implementing go-to-market strategies. He's also the author of "Marketing Direct: Breaking Through the Clutter." Working with organizations ranging from start-ups to Fortune 100 companies, he and his team have helped clients such as IBM, SAS Institute, Sony, Neiman Marcus, Arizona Highways, Marshall Field & Co., Mrs. Field's, UNICEF, SSA Global Technologies, Hartmarx, and Patagonia implement successful direct marketing programs. A longtime member of the Direct Marketing Association and the American Marketing Association, Stevenson is also a sought-after speaker. He's given hundreds of presentations and workshops on marketing and direct marketing. His "Marketing Planning 101" workshop alone has reached more than sixty thousand marketing and sales professionals.

PAT MCGRAW

For more than 25-years, Pat has been developing and leading integrated multi-channel direct marketing campaigns targeting B2B and B2C audiences for non-profit and for-profit organizations in education, technology, retail and other industries.

Drawing upon his experience in market research, competitive intelligence, data analytics and strategic planning, Pat identifies opportunities for success - new audiences to pursue, new markets to enter, new programs, products and services to develop and launch, pricing strategies, etc. And with his operational experience, Pat launches and manages integrated campaigns (recruitment and enrollment campaigns that attract, enroll and retain students more effectively for colleges, and lead generation and retention campaigns for tech firms, retailers and service firms). The results include lowering the cost to enroll a new student/attract a new customer, increasing retention rates and more.

Within the education sector, Pat has worked with leading service firms including Noel Levitz, Hobsons, Aslanian Market Research, as well as a wide variety of institutions including Greenville College and

Alvernia University to University of Maryland University College, Walden University, University of Chicago, Tulane University and others.

Outside of education, Pat has worked with leading corporations and service firms including Microsoft, IBM, Sears, Kmart, Insight, Barry Blau & Partners (currently Havas Worldwide) and more.