

Purdue University Partners with Eduventures to Address Retention and Recruiting Challenges

Challenge:

To support the objectives laid out in a new Strategic Plan, Purdue had the following goals:

- Understand why accepted students did not enroll in the university
- Decide which activities would be most effective when communicating with prospective students
- Examine the patterns of student attrition at Purdue

Solution:

Eduventures conducted a number of research studies that addressed Purdue's challenges and provided the evidence, data, and guidance Purdue needed to make decisions and implement change.

Results:

- Ability to place lower priority projects on the back burner, saving time and money
- Data to support additional funding for new scholarship packages
- New messaging for student support materials

About Purdue University:

Location: West Lafayette, IN

Carnegie Classification: Doctoral

Ownership: Public Institution

Size: 31,290 Undergraduate Students (2007)

About Eduventures:

Eduventures is the industry leader in research, analysis, and consulting for higher education. With more than 15 years experience in the field of higher education, Eduventures is committed to providing colleges and universities with cost-effective, data-driven insight to support institutional success.

About Eduventures Learning Collaboratives:

Eduventures Learning Collaboratives are member-driven research programs that help more than 300 institutions of higher education achieve organizational goals and solve pressing challenges with evidence-based insight and guidance.

Meeting Strategic Challenges

In response to a new university-wide Strategic Plan, the enrollment management office at Purdue University was facing a challenge. The plan, entitled New Synergies, detailed an ambitious agenda designed to help Purdue foster the leaders of tomorrow and meet the global challenges of a changing world. However, to meet this goal, Purdue was going to need to improve its ability to recruit talented students and improve the effectiveness of its retention efforts. To assist them in this effort, Purdue turned to Eduventures for guidance.

Improving the Effectiveness of Recruitment

To improve the effectiveness of its recruitment efforts, Purdue first wanted to better understand why students admitted to the university chose to enroll elsewhere. To accomplish this goal the Eduventures research team worked with Purdue to develop a survey that was sent to all students who were admitted to the university for the 2007-2008 academic year. Respondents were divided into two groups: students who chose to matriculate at Purdue and students who chose to matriculate elsewhere. Differences between the two groups were then analyzed.

According to Cathy Heinz, the Associate Director of Admissions at Purdue, one of the survey findings that was immediately actionable was that affordability was one of the major concerns for students who enrolled elsewhere. Said Heinz, "We knew that our scholarship offers were not meeting the needs of some of our potential students, but the anecdotal information we had wasn't enough to pursue additional funding. Having data to support that we were losing good applicants to our peers because they were offering bigger scholarships gave us the leverage we needed to secure much better scholarship packages for our students."

Using Data to Prioritize Communication

In addition, Purdue was able to use insight drawn from studies such as *Maximizing the Effectiveness of the Admissions Web-Site* and others in the Eduventures research library to improve the impact of its outreach with prospective students. Said Heinz "The thing that has been most valuable to me in our Eduventures membership is the assistance in prioritizing our communications activities. We are pulled in so many different

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Purdue University

directions and have to make decisions on what we can and can’t do – our membership provides research and data we never had before to help us formulate an informed strategy and evaluate what we are doing and modify it as needed.”

Tackling Retention Challenges

Student retention was another area in which Purdue was looking to improve its effectiveness. Among the specific goals laid out in the Strategic Plan was “*strong support services to increase success, retention, and graduation for students from all backgrounds, with particular attention to students performing below their*

potential success levels”. With Purdue currently facing retention and graduation rates slightly lower than its peers, Andrew Koch, the Director of Student Access, Transition and Success Programs (SATS), saw the Eduventures research team as a resource to help them meet this challenge.

Working with Koch and his team, Eduventures conducted two separate studies to help Purdue better understand some of the issues impacting student persistence at the institution. First Eduventures examined existing demographic and academic data Purdue had in-house to explore differences between students who were forced to withdraw from the university due to academic difficulty, students who voluntarily withdrew from the university, and students who persisted at the university. Next Eduventures conducted a survey of freshman and sophomore students to better understand the academic, social and economic factors that were impacting students’ decisions to continue their studies at Purdue.

According to Koch, one of the findings from the research that was most surprising was that students of all risk levels considered Purdue’s academic demands higher than originally expected and this was impacting their decision to persist at the university. Additionally, the report highlighted specific gateway courses where the rates of earning a D, F, or withdrawing were consistently higher for voluntary withdrawing students, indicating that these courses were causing otherwise academically strong students to drop out, in particular out-of-state students who were paying higher tuition.

Turning Insight Into Action

As a result of this insight, Koch has implemented a new SATS campaign entitled *High Expectations, Great Support*. The campaign highlights to incoming students the high academic expectations at Purdue as well as the variety of support services offered on campus. In addition, Koch has been able to use the research to better engage faculty on ways to improve student success. According to Koch, “These changes are a direct byproduct of Eduventures research,” and he added, “I’ve worked with a lot of for-profit and non-profit organizations doing work similar to Eduventures in the area of student enrollment and success so I wasn’t sure what to expect from our membership. However, not only have my expectations been exceeded but I am quite pleased with how Eduventures helps us and how responsive it has been to our needs.”

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