

# GREAT BASIN COLLEGE ENROLLMENT GROWTH STRATEGIES



## **ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT TRANSITION**

The transition to become an enrollment management organization is not an easy one. In 2018, the new Great Basin College President filled key leadership positions in institutional research and student and academic affairs that provided an opportunity to review current GBC enrollment operations and strategies. In the last six months, the new team has been able to lead discussions on student-centered enrollment strategies that lead to optimum enrollments rather than institutional structures based on historical precedence. The result was the creation and launch of a strategic enrollment management plan that transitioned GBC from a structural to a tactical organization

Colleges with a focus on growing their enrollments have identified strategic enrollment strategies that focus on how they attract, enroll, retain, and graduate students. Great Basin College had not had a comprehensive strategic enrollment management plan to identify data that supports building strategic enrollments.

Since February 2019, a SEM planning committee formed to provide college-wide leadership in strategic enrollment planning concurrent to ongoing student affairs restructuring efforts, department new hires, and process/policy improvement led by the vice president of student affairs. The SEM planning committee's charges were to create a multi-year, data-informed plan; assess GBC's current state; analyze key metrics such as market demand and need, student recruitment, student persistence and completion; academic offerings and making sure that the review process is ongoing. Due to the volume of activities involved, the SEM Committee identified the following sub-committees to meet the charge: Marketing and Recruitment, Advisement and Retention, Orientation, Student Strategic Communication and Enrollment Data. The idea of transitioning from a structural to tactical organization also meant a shift in understanding what a SEM plan could do for GBC's short and long-term fiscal growth. It was critical that our College also see the plan as an enrollment growth strategy that allows us to:

1. Predict Enrollments.
2. Help determine how we can best accommodate growth.
3. Improve the educational experience of students.
4. Project future student enrollment behavior.

## **ENROLLMENT GAPS**

Traditionally some colleges and universities utilize the image of the enrollment funnel to describe what happens to new recruits from prospect through matriculation. This image usually includes identifying yield rates between the steps of prospects, inquiries, applicants, accepted, enrolled and matriculated.

This has not historically occurred at GBC, creating difficulty in assessing enrollment trends or even knowing why enrollments were up or down. Decentralized enrollment management has occurred with a few academic departments to limited success in managing their own program enrollments, especially those departments with a special admissions process or state/federal/private funding. GBC has made tremendous efforts in identifying prospects but over the years faced difficulty managing the various stages described above. During FALL 2018, less than 25% of new prospects yielded matriculated students and that was during the same term when GBC had 13% increase in FTE from FALL 2017. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise to the new executive leadership that much of our opportunity to grow enrollment lies not with creating new programs alone or placing more funding into scholarships, but more importantly, our long-term ability to manage the enrollment funnel process.

The earlier work of the subcommittee groups involved identifying gaps in enrollment processes and creating a comprehensive plan that would reduce those gaps. While each of the subcommittees identified multiple enrollment gaps, six major enrollment gap themes appeared to have had a significant impact on GBC's past, current and future enrollments even with the recent increase in enrollment during FALL 2018. We strongly believe that if the six areas are adequately addressed between the period of SUMMER 2019 and FALL 2019 we could expect an additional increase in enrollments by SPRING 2020 that could far exceed the increase we had in FALL 2018.

### **LEADING GAPS**

#### **1. Marketing**

- a. Website content is not always up to date and often wordy without specification.
- b. Website not used as major marketing tool
- c. Website design needs to be updated
- d. Online and special programs not specifically targeted
- e. Marketing is not using enrollment data as basis for decision-making when determining campaigns

- f. Steps to Enroll not transparent

## **2. Inquiries about programs**

- a. Decentralized efforts by academic departments with various standards on replying to student requests or additional information.
- b. Many academic areas are not able to respond to inquiries during the Summer, a lead to the FALL term, due to faculty unavailability on campus during summer months.
- c. No one area responsible to communicate to students on application process or program information.
- d. No current tracking system available to see when or how often a student made an inquiry.

## **3. Application Process**

- a. Web Design and content of application has been described by both students and staff alike as “complicated, cumbersome, and confusing”.
- b. Information was not accurate and enrollment steps unclear.
- c. Acceptance letter following application is 2 pages.
- d. Application may require additional data questions to filter special populations.
- e. Students who choose Bachelor degree are not receiving clear directions they must first complete Associates degree.
- f. Students provided the option of an “Undecided” category which holds up their financial aid process.

## **4. Incoming Transcripts**

- a. Evaluation and posting of incoming transcripts delayed 8-15 weeks or longer.
- b. No consistent communication as to when transcript evaluation and posting completed.
- c. Students could be taking additional classes that are not necessary due to timeliness of evaluation and posting.
- d. Insufficient staff assigned to assist with evaluation and posting process.

## **5. Strategic Communication to Students**

- a. Students not communicated consistently on enrollment steps.
- b. No consistent and timely communication when an enrollment process is completed or updated.
- c. Text messaging as a mass communication tool to students currently not utilized (with the exception of emergency alerts).
- d. Student bad addresses and bad phone numbers not being verified before allowing to reenroll.

- e. Improved communication necessary with financial aid deadlines, payment deadlines, campus events, credit and noncredit new programs and courses.

## **6. Advisement**

- a. GBC has a decentralized advisement model; some academic areas involved in advisement but currently no coordination or consistency in advisement across all campus areas.
- b. 1 FTE Professional Advisor; insufficient amount of FT professional advisors to serve GBC's student population.
- c. Online students less likely to be advised; self-advisement occurs often.
- d. Assigning of advisors is not automated or consistent.
- e. Professional and faculty advisors require training.
- f. Orientation experience missing learning outcomes and was not a mandatory experience.
- g. Student education plans are available but differ from one location to the next. No tracking technology used to share or monitor student education plans.
- h. Consistent retention strategies of special populations not consistently exercised.
- i. Faculty are not on campus during the summer to provide advising to students.
- j. Lack of common area for notes and case management that is accessible by all.
- k. Lack a user-friendly site that has advising resources for all staff
- l. Students declare majors and have not met prerequisites.
- m. Unclear whether ALL teaching faculty are advising and responding to student requests both timely and consistently.

## **ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES**

The planning committee will continue its work during the SUMMER/FALL 2019 semester to flesh out the necessary strategies and tactics. Through various workgroups on campus many strategic strategies have already been identified and the immediate focus will be on six gap areas previously discussed.

Marketing and Recruitment

### **Goal 1: Consistency in marketing programs and services**

1. Meet with department chairs and deans once a semester web content review process to discuss changes to webpages and department brochures.
2. Develop website template for academic areas and student service areas to create consistent design.
3. Develop deadlines for changes to webpages.
4. Utilize enrollment data to determine decisions on marketing campaigns.
5. Identify a process for submitting a website change or update.
6. Work with WNC, also housed on the same server, on opportunities using their Content Management System.
7. Highlight student success stories on GBC college website and social media.
8. Hire a Chief Communication Officer by Summer 2019.

## **Goal 2: Student Program Inquiry**

1. Centralize student inquiry process with current website or Onbase platform with one office/staff leading the student response.
2. Research any opportunities to prevent gaps in recruitment by obtaining a Customer Relations Management System (CRM) to track communications and completed enrollment steps with prospective students.

## **Goal 3: Application Process**

1. Partner with WNC to create new web-based integrated application that will provide clear design, concise information, along with consistent steps to apply and register for class.
2. Redesign acceptance letter with clear next steps.
3. Create clear instruction that provide reason why students must first select Associate degree pathway prior to be admitted into Bachelor degree program.
4. Consider elimination of “undecided” option.

#### **Goal 4: Incoming Transcripts**

1. Modify process of evaluating and posting transcripts using workflow to be completed from 8-15 weeks to 1-2 weeks.
2. Ensure students receive automated communication for transcripts received and when transcripts have been evaluated and posted.
3. Assign and train additional staff to assist with evaluation and posting.

#### **Goal 5: Strategic Communication to Students**

1. Purchase text messaging application.
2. Alert students with notification when enrollment step has been completed.
3. Create process to place a student hold on bad address/telephone information.
4. Develop strategic communication calendar of all important communications going out to students each semester along with modality being used.

#### **Goal 6: Advisement**

1. Implement centralize advisement model and required training of all professional and faculty advisors.
2. Develop an advisement model using a case management approach and intrusive advisement model strategies.
3. Hire additional 4 FTE professional advisors.
4. Develop mandatory student advisement experience to be implemented SPRING 2020.
5. Develop mandatory student orientation experience to be implemented SPRING 2020.
6. Assign all new students an advisor within 24 hours of receipt of application.
7. Utilize Starfish to retain web-based student education plan accessible to both professional and academic advisors.
8. Identify special populations (e.g. veterans, low income, satisfactory academic progress) with lowest persistence rates to develop regular retention campaign strategies to increase retention.
9. Review opportunities to contract eight faculty part-time advisors during summer term.
10. Utilize Starfish to track advisement appointments, advisement notes, and referrals as part of a case management approach to advisement.

11. Identify an advisement resources page for professional and faculty advisors.

## **PROGRESS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE**

The heavy focus for this first year has been on implementing change to impact the fall 2019 and spring 2020 enrollment. As of June 30, 2019 GBC has:

### Enrollment Processes

- Implemented a class waitlist that will be accessible by all academic advisors. (June 2019)
- Began planning design of a new admission application utilizing Onbase to offer a clear and concise, easy to navigate application process for new applicants. (June 2019)
- Continuing our efforts to reduce default rate. Reduction in default rate went from 21% one year ago to 11%. (March 2019)
- Revised acceptance letter to offer clear enrollment next steps. (April 2019)
- Trained additional staff to assist with evaluation and posting of incoming transcripts as temporary measure to expedite transfer enrollment process.

### Recruitment

- Planning and design of an Onbase centralized student inquiry/lead form completed. (June 2019)

### Marketing

- Implemented differentiated marketing approaches for program specific and local target recruitment markets. (May 2019)
- Hired a chief communication officer that will oversee college strategic communications and marketing department. (June 2019)

### Advisement

- Began hiring process for full-time academic advisor. (May 2019)
- Posted a GBC/UNR Transfer Coordinator position as part of a GBC/UNR MOU agreement on shared services. (June 19)
- Posted a Director of Advisement position. (June 19)
- Restructured NSHE Specialist position to an Academic Advisor position. (June 2019)
- Hired a student life coordinator to include duties of academic advisement. (May 2019)

- Hired a veteran resource coordinator that will supervise the first one stop for all veteran services to include academic advisement of veteran students. (June 2019)
- Development of an online advisement training manual in progress. (April 19)
- Increased previously reported goals to have 2.0 FTE advisors to 6.0 FTE advisors by Fall 2019. (June-July 2019)
- Began initial planning for college-wide Advisement Summit. (April 2019)
- The Starfish early alert and retention system is live. (June 2019)
- Reduced student advisement appointments setup from one hour to 30 minute sessions. (June 30)

#### Data

- Continue to add various enrollment data reports for college-wide access and decision-making. (April 2019)
- Identified key performance indicators with student success, attendance, completion rate, early student alert, persistence, retention and application yield/conversion rate. (April 2019)

#### Staff Development, Training and Procedures

- Student Affairs senior staff completed book read and discussion of “The Long Distance Leader” that focuses on the challenges and strategies for leading at a distance. (June 2019)
- Staff have begun planning for Student Affairs Training Day in FA19. (May 2019)
- Staff are identifying gaps in institutional procedures and training plans. (May 2019)
- Continue to surpass weekly and monthly enrollment goals. (June 2019)
- Revised a deficient college policy on enrollment cancelation that prior to the SP19 term resulted in approximately \$500,000 or more each academic year in revenue and enrollment loss. (January 2019)

Additional work is underway this fall 2019 on a number of fronts. We are continuing efforts to optimize college and departmental websites and messaging. Working with our various centers, we have undertaken an assessment of enrollment functions, cross training center staff to assist with meeting enrollment process goals as online enrollment continues to grow.

Many of these structural changes are just the beginning and are already impacting prospective and current students. At the same, GBC’s adopting a change management philosophy approach to how we accomplish change. GBC will:

1. Identify what needs to be improved.
2. Present a solid business case to stakeholders
3. Plan for the change
4. Provide resources and use data for evaluation
5. Communicate the change
6. Monitor and manage resistance, dependencies, and budgeting risks
7. Celebrate our successes
8. Review, revise, and continuously improve

In conclusion, GBC's focus will continue to be on improving student success and the quality of the student experience as well as improving the planning process to reduce instability in enrollment growth through more measured growth strategies. Our immediate threats to student success and program quality have been more transparent through the reduction of resources necessary to provide student support services, adequate faculty and state of the art classroom technology. GBC depends heavily on state appropriations, tuition, and foundation support, all of which will likely see limited increases in the foreseeable future. The enrollment strategies outlined will move GBC to be a tactical organization by taking the approach that doing more is not always as important as being strategic in determining how we predict enrollment growth. GBC will quarterly evaluate the six enrollment strategies for continuous improvement.