14 Ways to Reinvigorate Your Adult Student Recruiting Strategies

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Today's adult students have an unparalleled number and array of educational options. As a result, many programs that once successfully recruited adult students are facing enrollments that have plateaued, or even fallen.

We prepared this white paper to help those colleges that want to reinvigorate their adult recruiting strategies. Of course, many of the recommendations contained herein would help any college that wants to grow enrollment.
Some marketing truths
It is interesting to us how many colleges and universities continue to debate issues related to adult student marketing and recruiting that are well settled in the data. For example, we know with certainty that adult students:
- Define quality with a strong emphasis on cost
- Consider secondary, but also important, definitions of quality including convenience, flexibility, and time to completion
- Are program-driven
- Are very outcomes oriented
- Are more interested in shorter terms than longer terms
- Are more often interested in commodity buys than brand buys
- Seek hybrid educational experiences that include both online and face-to-face experiences
- Value opportunities to participate in small group/cohort models
- Equate faculty quality and their availability and their real-world experience
These truths will help guide the comments below.

1. Create robust student profiles
An essential first step in invigorating your recruiting strategies is developing a deep understanding of not only who enrolls, but who persists on to degree or program completion. Developing this deep understanding involves creating a robust student profile that has four elements:
- Demographic
- Psychographic
- Program format
- Reach profile

The demographic profile answers the question: Who are our students? As such, it considers gender, ethnicity, household income, location, distance from college, current educational status, academic preparedness, etc. This information is especially important for identifying potential list sources.

The psychographic profile answers the question: Why are students interested in returning to school? This profile is interested in student motivations for college, fears and reservations, and expected benefits. This information will help guide your communication strategies.

The program format profile answers the question: What kinds of programs are students interested in? It looks at academic interests, desired program formats, preferred delivery options, and program length. This information will influence program design.

The reach profile helps you identify the best way to attract, or reach these students. This profile addresses such issues as media and channel preferences, optimal recruiting strategies, influencers, and even recruiting windows. This information will help guide the creation of your recruiting communication plan.

As noted in strategy 6 on page 9, you should create a robust profile for each major adult student segment. However, if creating profiles is a new strategy to you, we suggest that you begin with one or two profiles. As you become more adept, add profiles of major student groups.

Resource for you: Here is a link to a profile grid we created for your use: Stamats.com/profile-grid.

Program Format
We know a great deal about the program formats of most interest to adult students. For example, adult students prefer:
- Required courses that are offered at times convenient to them
- Shorter semesters and quarters
- Eight weeks is becoming the standard
- Hybrid offerings that include a mixture of online and face-to-face courses
- The opportunity to join a cohort group
Identifying new programs
Refining your program mix will likely involve identifying new academic programs. When we work with clients on new programs we actually use a template that looks at four key issues:

- Strategic fit—does the program make sense institutionally?
- Economic fit—do the economic requirements and realities of the program make sense?
- Marketplace demand—is there clear data that projects near- and long-term demand?
- Promotion/marketing requirements—do we understand how to market this program?

In addition to making sure that all key issues are covered, using a consistent template for new programs offers one more benefit: it allows the easy comparison of potential programs so the best possible decision can be made.

Resource for you: We have developed an expanded business plan template for new majors that contains a series of questions for each of the four categories outlined above. For a copy, go to: Stamats.com/new-majors.

3. Assess current marketing and recruiting practices
One of the best ways to improve future adult recruiting efforts is to assess current recruiting strategies and methods to make sure you are aligned with best practices. In particular, you want to look at how your adult marketing and recruiting strategies perform in the areas of:

- Marketing
  - Audience segmentation
  - Brand
  - Lead generation
  - Direct marketing
  - Web strategy including search engine marketing (SEM)
  - Social media strategy
  - Communication flow
- Customer service including prospect and inquiry response time
- Staffing
- Application process
- Territory management
- Use of technology
- Territory management
- Use of measuring ROI (return on investment) strategies

Even the most basic recruiting assessment will likely uncover opportunities to improve efficiencies and increase performance.

The Big Four
As noted earlier, while there are many variables that adult students consider when choosing a school or a program, the four primary drivers are:

- Cost
- Convenience
- Flexibility
- Time to completion

If we added a fifth item to the list it would be, for many students, advising. Data suggests that academic and career advising are of increasing interest to adult students.

If adult students do not believe that your program offers a better option than those offered by your competitors they will not enroll.
7. Streamline your communication flow

Few strategies will have a more immediate and positive impact on your recruiting efforts than the creation of a communication sequence map.

A communication sequence map is a longitudinal look at the entire flow of communication—print, direct mail, email, phone, social, campus visit, and advertising—between your program and a prospective student.

By assessing and then refining the entire communication flow en masse, message integration is increased, efficiencies and effectiveness are improved, redundancies are eliminated, and the ability to track ROI is enhanced.

**Resource for you:** If you would like to see a copy of a communication sequence map, please go to this link: Stamats.com/sequence-map.

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8. Be predictive

Predictive models are based on a statistical profile that identifies the combinations of student characteristics and student actions that lead to, or predict, enrollment. As such, a model will help you:

- Identify and target students that are a better institutional or program fit
- Direct dollars to students more likely to persist and thereby reduce marketing and recruiting expenditures

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9. Develop an adult-centric website

In most cases, adult students look at your site in two ways. First, they want to know that the site contains the information they need and that this information is easy to find. Second, adults want to get a sense from your site that they are valued.

At the very least, this requires that your adult recruiting site features:

- Fast facts about your academic programs
- Scheduling information, especially term length and calendar starts
- A clear road map to completion with easily understood progress markers
- Cost before and after a typical aid package
- Information about the amount, composition, and source of financial aid
- Transfer information
- Graduation requirements
- Advising information

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- Accreditation information
- Information for veterans
- Information on key faculty
- Outcome/career information
- Testimonies from other adult students (video is best)
- A simple and easy-to-complete application form

At the same time, your site must:

- Be responsive (run on multiple platforms)
- Have content that is current, of high quality, and dynamic (interactive)
- Be interactive and emotive
- Optimized for SEO
- Have a clear call to action at multiple levels
- Be tied graphically to the primary, institutional site
- Feature a dynamic and intuitive customer relationship management (CRM) system

Earlier we mentioned that a site must engage students. One great strategy is
### Master Student Profile

**Adult Student Segment:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic profile:</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households income</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment status</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How they will pay for college</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Types/amount of financial aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average driving distance/Average drive time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geodemographic profile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychographic profile:</th>
<th>Primary motivators for returning to/going to college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipated benefits/outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fears and reservations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program profile:</th>
<th>Majors of most interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program delivery</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reach profile:</th>
<th>Who influences them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What social media they follow/participate in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What traditional media they follow/listen to/view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What marketing strategies they respond to most</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What lists capture their name/address/interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Nontraditional students do not have four-year envy

“Randy’s going to tell us all how to fix our problem with nontraditional students...” Thus began the introduction to my presentation, “Innovative Ways to Recruit Nontraditional Students” at a conference of community college enrollment marketers in Biloxi.

“No pressure!” I thought. Community colleges, like many four-year institutions, are facing shortfalls in enrollment this year, after seeing record numbers of students not so long ago. Unlike many of their four-year brethren, however, many community colleges are ideally suited to serve the one remaining bright spot in enrollment opportunity—the so-called nontraditional student. They can offer the affordability, convenience, and flexibility that four-years struggle to provide. Despite a slight turndown over the last year due to an improving economy, learners who aren’t 17–24, and who aren’t registered full-time, now make up roughly 70% of the enrolled population. Why aren’t community colleges (and four-years) doing a better job of recruiting them?

As I did my research to build the presentation, I visited the websites of numerous community colleges around the country. It didn’t take me long to figure out what the issues were. While I was looking at community colleges specifically, I believe the issues are common to all institutions that are attempting to serve nontraditional students.

Scrimmages. Leafy quads with logo-wearing 18-year-olds. Mascots. Marching bands. Great... if you’re selling the traditional four-year experience. Not so great if I’m a 50-year-old executive who just got laid off from my high tech job, or if I’m a single mom struggling to raise two kids. For traditional students, one of the overriding factors in the selection of one college over another is, will I fit in? For someone who’s thinking about going back to school, the question is the same. Based upon the websites of these community colleges, the answer is a resounding no!

One size does not fit all when it comes to nontraditional students

Nontraditional students come in all sorts of demographic flavors. Delayed starters, Certificate seekers, Career retoolers, Degree completers, Continuing ed returners. But when I chatted with my friends in Biloxi, most admitted that they communicated with their nontraditional prospects as a homogenous mass, clearly missing the opportunity to engage with their prospects on a much more targeted level.

Research indicates that, once a prospect visits your website, they’ll stay in the consideration phase for an average of two months, and for as many 18 months. Static websites and transaction-based emails do little, if anything, to move the prospect closer to commitment. Where’s the content that will keep them engaged and moving forward over months of deliberation?

So did I “fix” their problems? Probably not, but...

**Here are some approaches that I’ve seen work with nontraditional populations:**

- Decide which segments of the nontraditional population offer the most potential for your college and laser focus on them.
- Create a web experience and content assets targeted to address the wants, needs, desires, and fears of these specific populations. Do some interviews, dig beneath the surface, and create personas for each segment.
- Use highly targeted digital outreach vs. mass media to build awareness and encourage inquiry. You’ll save money and get better results.
- Nurture, nurture, nurture. These prospects may be in your pipeline for a long time. Use the opportunity to continue to build a relationship with them by keeping content fresh and relevant.
- Measure and optimize. Digital approaches give us the opportunity to assess performance in real time, make adjustments, test, and maximize our effectiveness.

Interested in attracting more nontraditional students to your institution? Let’s chat more about how you can use strategic content to attract, engage, and enroll nontraditional students. Drop me a note at randy.burge@stamats.com, follow me on Twitter @strategyfirst1, or call me in Albany at 518-591-4640.

Also, consider joining us at the 2016 Stamats Adult Student Integrated Marketing Conference, taking place February 22–23 in San Antonio, Texas.
**Mistake 5: Sailing too hard.** Providing advising is far more effective than a hard sell. Key to recruiting part-time students is thoroughly informing them of the nature of the degree it will take to complete the program, ways of earning academic credit through testing or life experience, the transferability of the credits they may have earned elsewhere, and reassurance that they can succeed. In other words, counseling prospective students is critical. If a prospective student will not come to the office for counseling, telemarketers should be trained to provide academic counseling and provide registration over the phone. Part-time students will not be fooled by slick publications and well-honed messages. They want to know what it will take to get in, what will they get out of it, how long will it take and will any credits transfer or life experiences be counted.

**Mistake 6: Targeting too broadly.** Just as is the case with traditional undergraduate recruitment, much of non-traditional-age student recruitment depends on word of mouth. Current and past students are a program's best sales people. Employer support is also important. On the other hand, television, radio and newspaper are costly and generally have limited impact. If you feel you must use the mass media, then target narrowly. For example, advertise in towns and regions where the incomes are above $40,000 and a large percent of the residents have some college (targets for degree completion) or bachelor's degrees (targets for graduate programs).

**General Recommendations for Recruiting Part-time Students**

In our surveys of men and women considering a part-time program, we have learned what factors are most likely to positively impact a decision to enroll.

**Target locally.** In all our research, a large percentage of respondents said programs near their home or near their place of work might motivate them to enroll. Based on this information the three most important natural markets for part-time students are 1) those who live in the vicinity of the campus, 2) those who work near the campus or 3) those who travel near the campus on their way to and from their place of work.

There are several steps to targeting locally:

1. Learn about the various residential neighborhoods and businesses within the areas.
2. Review the traffic pattern of the major arteries near your campus. Try to determine who travels near your campus on their way to and from work and learn where they are going.
3. Be certain that all advertising shows how convenient your institution is to major arteries.
4. Determine the best way to get information on your part-time graduate programs posted in local businesses.
5. Offer "neighborhood scholarships" to prime the pump. The Small Town Scholarship would be a modest reduction in fees for residents in a specific small town. Target only areas with the most productive demographics.

**Develop Flexible Programming.** Most institutions can carve out a relatively nice piece of the part-time graduate student pie if they offer a few popular, but also truly flexible, programs for part-time graduate students. By flexible we mean a program where students can choose from day, evening, and weekend courses. In our studies, more than one of two respondents in all areas said a combination of day and evening would greatly increase their interest in attending. By keeping the number of programs limited, maintaining a flexible program would not be as difficult as trying to offer all programs on a flexible basis. For example, only "core" courses required in several programs would be offered on the weekend.

**Focus on the Fall.** Fall is the time when non-traditional students and graduate students think about returning for course work. While the fall and winter were the most popular combination, in our studies fall is the preferred single season. This suggests that the strategy should be to place the greatest emphasis on advertising and promotion in the late summer for fall enrollment. Then place the emphasis on internal
promotion and, perhaps, discounting to encourage those who start in the fall to stay throughout the year.

We are not implying that no advertising be done at other times of the year, but the fall should be the time of greatest interest.

The surprising low interest in spring and summer to take classes suggests that an institution consider one of two possibilities:

- Limit offerings in the spring and summer to courses with the greatest demand, or reduce the schedule considerably.

- Develop incentives for students to come in the spring and summer. For example, a student who takes two courses in the winter can get a spring course at half price.

**Be More Generous with Credit.** We know this will be a controversial recommendation at any campus, but we known an institution can be a force to be reckoned with if it offers undergraduate or graduate credit for work experience or encourages credit by examination. A vast majority of respondents in all our studies say they would be motivated by “academic credit for what you have learned in your job” and “academic credit for experiences in your life.”

**Work with Employers.** Not surprisingly in our surveys, it is clear that encouragement from employers and especially help with tuition is a major motivator. Getting employers to take your institution seriously as an “undergraduate or graduate program vendor” is, therefore, critical. Below we suggest ways to get started.

**Establish an advisory group.** The human resource managers at the largest employers within your institution’s sphere and owners of more modest enterprises should be asked to join a professional advisory panel. Their role would be to advise on course and program offerings at the graduate level in all appropriate fields, suggest marketing strategies, and help promote the programs of your institution.

**Survey area employers.** With the help of the advisory panel develop a survey of all employers in the area concerning needs, tuition benefits and so forth. Ask the “heavies” on the panel to be point people. That is, send the survey over their signatures.

**Take courses to the employers.** If an employer is interested, take courses and programs to their site rather than expect students to come to your institution.
As mentioned in the last section, the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development has made the recruitment of foreign students and international engagement in higher education a national priority. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), the work has paid off, as international student enrollment in Canada for 2013 was up by nearly 100 percent over the decade prior. The success of the "Imagine" brand campaign, which "conveys a message of openness and support through the concept of 'empowered idealism,'" along with efforts at the national, provincial and institutional levels, led to a proposed $23 million action plan through 2015 to further support international recruitment.

**ADULT LEARNERS**

Outside of international student recruitment, trends in higher education indicate that another key audience for enrollment is adult and non-traditional learners. In the United States, the number of adult learners returning to higher education, particularly for continuing education, has been rapidly increasing. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, "in recent years, the percentage increase in the number of students age 25 and over has been larger than the percentage increase in the number of younger students, and this pattern is expected to continue." By 2020, the percentage of enrollments for students 25 and older is projected to increase by 20 percent over 2010 levels.

In Canada, similar trends are expected. According to the Centre for the Study of Education and Work's WALL Surveys, there has been "a rapid intergenerational increase in the extent of engagement" in adult further education, and at least half of the population aged 25-64 pursues some kind of continuing higher education. In addition, the same surveys indicate that as of 2010, almost 20 percent of that age bracket was facing problems of unmet need in further education. Figure 2.3 indicates the growth in further education participation rates among adults in Canada over the last several decades:

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32 Ibid., p. 2.
34 Ibid.
Figure 2.3: Post-secondary Completion and Further Education Participation Rates, 25-64 Year Olds, Canada, 1976-2010 (by percent)

Recruiting these students will tap an unmet demand and growing market segment for both countries, and has required recruitment strategies that speak directly to this demographic. While some of the methods are the same as recruiting “traditional” students (e.g., quality communication methods, effective websites, using social media, etc.), other trends are noticeable in how institutions make their programs more attractive to adult learners. One of the most common practices is the design of highly flexible programs that meet the needs of working professionals, including expanding offerings in the part-time and evening course segments, and increasing the number of options for online education. Additional strategies institutions have pursued include providing greater flexibility for transfer credits, improving lead quality when identifying students, and designing programs specifically for students as opposed to merely adapting existing programs.

CHANGING ADMISSIONS STANDARDS

For some institutions, one practice that feeds directly back into the expansion of enrollments for foreign and adult students is the lowering of admissions standards in order to boost numbers. This naturally brings both positive and negative effects to a university, and there has been brisk discussion about this topic more generally in a variety of venues, and on several fronts. While the net positive impacts of lowering enrollment standards are
Factors to enroll: Comparison of adult undergraduate and graduate students

Campuses typically serve two types of adult students (typically considered to be those nontraditional students over the age of 25): those in undergraduate degree programs and those completing graduate degree courses. How do the priorities of these two groups of students compare when they consider enrolling in an institution?

Adult students: Undergraduate students vs. graduate students

This chart lists the nine enrollment factors on the Adult Student Priorities Survey. The percentages reflect students who indicated that the item was important or very important. The additional charts in this report reflect similar measurements.

For adult students in undergraduate and graduate programs, academic reputation had equal importance and topped the priority list for both groups. The availability of evening and weekend courses also had equal importance for both groups of students and was the second most important enrollment factor.

Cost and financial aid were more critical to undergraduate students than those in graduate programs. Undergraduates ranked cost 9.3 percentage points higher and financial aid/scholarship opportunities 7.5 percentage points higher than graduate students. Undergraduate adults were also more likely to be influenced by their family, friends, and employers, as indicated by the 6.7 percentage points difference in importance scores for this item. Future employment was the one factor that was more important to graduate students, with an importance score that was 3.1 percentage points higher.
Academic reputation was the number-one factor to enroll for graduate students at their first-choice institution. They also rated this factor 2.4 percentage points higher than students at their second- or third-choice institution. The top factor for students who are not at their first-choice institution was the availability of evening and weekend programs, which was 2.8 percentage points more important to them than students at their first-choice institution.

Cost and employment opportunities were the two items with the greatest difference among graduate students. Students at their second- or third-choice institution rated cost 5.5 percentage points higher and future employment opportunities 5.2 percentage points higher than students at their first choice, while first-choice students rated recommendations from family, friends, and employers 4.3 percentage points higher.

Factors to enroll: Comparison of undergraduate and graduate online learners

Online learners are a rapidly growing segment of nontraditional students. They can also be separated into those enrolled in undergraduate programs and those taking graduate coursework online. It is interesting to identify how factors in the decision to enroll for these different student populations vary.

Online learners: Undergraduate students vs. graduate students

Convenience was the number-one factor cited by both online undergraduate and graduate students, with both groups giving it the same high level of priority. Flexible pacing and work schedule followed close behind for all online learners. While recommendations from employers carry the least amount of importance to students in both categories, it is the item with the biggest difference: 11.1 percent more undergraduates flagged this factor as important than graduate students did. Several other factors were also more important to undergraduate students enrolled in online programs than they were to their graduate student counterparts (percentage point difference in parentheses): distance from campus (6.6), cost (5.9), financial assistance (5.4), future employment opportunities (3.7), and reputation of the institution (3.2).
How these findings impact your plan for student recruitment and retention

What do these results signify for campus professionals? The results suggest four priority action items:

1. **Prospective and current students want to know how much their education will cost.** This is true for both traditional and nontraditional populations. Your Web site and other campus communications should make this information accessible. If you are changing tuition, communicate this clearly to current students, as well as why tuition is changing and how students will benefit from the change. Be sure to make full use of federally mandated tuition calculators to provide complete, current information to prospective and current students on your Web site.

2. **Make financial aid information easy to obtain.** While financial aid may not motivate a nontraditional student to select your institution as much as it may motivate a traditional student, adult and online learners are still very aware of how a financial aid package makes the educational experience possible. Information on all financial resources, including scholarships, are important to help nontraditional students know they can afford to enroll at your institution.

3. **Use your academic reputation to express the value of your educational offerings.** As with traditional students, adult and online learners need to know that an education from your institution is worth the investment. Making the strengths, features, benefits, and outcomes of your academic offerings clear will go a long way toward helping prospective students decide to enroll with you, as well as convincing current students to persist and graduate. Your faculty and staff should also express your institution’s academic excellence in their interactions with students.

4. **Emphasize the convenience of your adult-serving programs.** Nontraditional students are often juggling multiple responsibilities, such as work and home, along with coursework. They place a premium on the convenience of your course offerings, whether through evening and weekend courses or with the 24/7 accessibility of online courses. Be sure to be mindful of these priorities as your institution develops and promotes the undergraduate and graduate courses you offer.

In addition, while adult students often have higher expectations in other areas that influence enrollment, they still place a value on personalized attention prior to enrollment. Delivering personalized attention at every point of contact—in the mail, online, over the phone, and on campus—can make a big difference in persuading a student to enroll as well as persist. It’s also an area where your campus has a unique opportunity to differentiate itself from other institutions.

To address these top four elements, tell students what their education will cost, what financial assistance is available, the value of your educational offerings, and highlight the convenience offered by your institution.
WHY YOU SHOULD RECRUIT NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS DIFFERENTLY

by Jeremy Tiers, Director of Admissions Services

The Times They Are a-Changin’. Bob Dylan’s legendary song would be an appropriate description if you were asked to summarize the makeup of today’s college student body.

Colleges and Universities still enroll plenty of high school graduates. However, the fastest growing segment of the higher education market is non-traditional students. Roughly 40% of all college students are older than 24, according to U.S. Education Department data.

The thing is, a 32-year old single mom wants something completely different than an 18-year old high achieving student whose most recent dilemma was what to wear to prom. These two demographics have different expectations, different motivations, and different objections.

When advising clients on assembling their recruiting communications for these non-traditional prospects, we emphasize the importance of creating different messaging and using different techniques to secure their commitment.

Let’s start by defining some characteristics that today’s non-traditional student possesses:

- Usually 24 years old and older
- Delays enrollment
- Attends college part-time
- Employed (works 30 hours or more per week while enrolled)
- Has dependents (spouse, children)
- Is a single parent (studies show that women make up 71% of all student parents)
- Mid career professional
- Often looking to advance their career or achieve a personal goal
- Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for

http://dantutor.com/why-you-should-recruit-non-traditional-students-differently/
financial aid

Once you’ve put together a detailed profile of a typical non-traditional student that your institution believes is most likely to succeed at your school, you’re then ready to start marketing to this group.

Let’s take a look at some of the key differences between these two groups. Furthermore, how do you use those differences to your advantage against your competition that is looking to enroll the same non-traditional recruits? Here are three big things we think every admissions office should know:

- **Unlike their traditional counterparts, non-traditional prospects don’t rely on their parents’ opinion as they make their decision.** Non-traditional students feel they are in charge of their educational career. They are largely independent and more concerned about paying bills on time and making school fit with their work schedule, than whether or not mom and dad approve of a school. What this means for you is that you won’t need to spend the same amount of time recruiting their parents as we recommend for a high school prospect.

- **Unlike their traditional counterparts, you’re going to find it much, much harder to get in touch with non-traditional prospects.** These students are juggling multiple responsibilities in addition to work. It’s going to be difficult to reach them by phone. What should you do? We have found that creating weekly standing appointments, or ones every other week, is a successful strategy. It goes on their schedule and is much more convenient, which is something they place a premium on. Social media is another easy way to connect with this demographic. They access Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter in many cases more frequently than their traditional counterparts, and research shows they’re generally open to these forms of communication. Use these to show the prospect things your campus offers that will be of benefit to them. Finally, I’ll repeat something that I said earlier. Don’t forget that those increased responsibilities to their families gives non-traditional students more opportunities to procrastinate or be distracted from taking that next step in the admissions process. It’s your responsibility to make them feel wanted, help them connect the dots, and keep them on track.

- **Unlike their traditional counterparts, non-traditional prospects won’t be as concerned with your dorms, meal plan or school activities.** Moving out of their
parent’s home is something that’s difficult for many traditional students. Most will live on campus and thus want comfortable accommodations and a meal plan with some variety. For non-traditional students this isn’t something they generally need or want to have to pay for. They don’t go to college for socialization or fancy dorms, and have their own support systems outside of school. Besides your institution’s academic reputation, here are some things that non-traditional students value greatly. Start with availability of evening, weekend or even distance learning courses. These are a necessity. Your school’s career center is also a valuable tool that you can highlight. Connecting them to someone in the career center early in the process is highly recommended. Lastly the flexibility to complete their degree at their own pace matters significantly. Your messaging should address topics such as these, as well as any other areas that are important to them.

Non-traditional students have also made it clear they’re more likely to use the internet to gather research on schools, versus scheduling a campus visit. They simply don’t have enough time in their hectic schedule. This means your digital marketing needs to be strong and have a section that clearly defines your non-traditional program offerings as well as things like financial aid. They need to be able to know how they will piece it all together and ultimately fit in on your campus. You must help them connect all the dots.

Even though non-traditional students won’t be attending college in the traditional sense, there is one big similarity between the two groups that an admissions counselor should never forget. Non-traditional students also place a high value on personalized attention prior to enrollment. Personalization at every point of contact — direct mail, online, over the phone, and on campus can make a big difference in persuading a non-traditional student to enroll.

Just remember that if your school is committed to enrolling more non-traditional students, you need to approach them differently than your high school prospects. They are very, very different.

Jeremy and the experts at Tudor Collegiate Strategies can help you develop personalized messaging for all different types of recruits, including non-traditional students. Want to learn how? Email him directly at jeremy@dantudor.com
Nontraditional or (new-traditional) students, as they are sometimes referred to today, are not only the new type of student of the age, but they are also the new majority. The typical college student today is not necessarily the 18-to 22-year-old college kid living at home or residentially on a campus, with a 15-hour course load. No. Instead, today's student, the adult student, is a highly engaged, motivated, busy, and focused prospect, and a ripe field for the harvest. Today's nontraditional student comes to the college table probably with an 18-year-old college student in tow, a full-time job, a family to care for, community and church obligations, and very limited time on his or her hands. He or she is interested in training, certificates, licenses, continuing education, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, graduate degrees, and life-enriching courses. There are 17.6 million undergraduate students in the U.S. today: 38% of those are over 25 years old and 25% are over 30 years old. The share of all students over 25 years of age is projected to increase another 23% by 2019.

To reach them, colleges must craft and disseminate messages that let the nontraditional student know that he or she can choose his or her own adventure. These students want flexibility in price, delivery format, location, and time, and they want to enroll anytime, anywhere, and set their own pace. This is where recruiting nontraditional students is and is going. Adult students aren't necessarily starting from scratch either. Who are they? They are community college students at the age of 45; they are standing in the unemployment line at the Employment Commission's office; and they are withdrawals or dropouts from colleges who are pining away for another shot at achieving their educational goal. To understand how an adult spends his or her time is critical to understanding how difficult it is for an adult to fit education in, how diverse and flexible colleges must be, and when, how, and where marketing higher
education is important. On an average workday, adults aged 25-54 with children will spend 7.6 hours sleeping, 8.8 hours working or related activities, 2.5 hours on leisure and sports, 1.1 hours on household activities, 1.1 hours eating and drinking, 1.2 hours caring for others, and a measly 1.7 hours doing “other.” Specific marketing messages, delivered at the right time with the right design through the appropriate channels and with the knowledge of how to reach the nontraditional student audience, are paramount for a college to gain the most traction with its adult prospects.

With concept and brand as the focal points when targeting adult students, utilizing multiple media channels with fewer messages is the key. For example, to reach a subtarget of the greater adult student target audience (i.e., graduate students) utilizing media platforms similar to those used with traditional students – website presence, events, social media, print, video, and virtual fairs – would require consistent and focused messages relevant to and pointed at your graduate prospect population. An example of a prime market for adult students is the usage of texting, which is on the rise and will continue to increase, as texting is the most prevalent activity among mobile device owners. Forty-four percent of U.S. adult households own smartphones, 19% own tablets, and 16% of adults watch video clips on their smartphones. **Adults aged 18-29 were the highest text users at 97%, sending roughly 87 texts per day.** Around 92% of 30- to 49-year-olds are texting, at an average of 30 texts per day, and 72% of the 50- to 64-year-old adult group is texting. Black (80%) and Hispanic (85%) texters outtexted the Caucasian (79%) texter. Adult students today not only utilizes this technology for their own media consumption, but also, for many reasons, their use of technology is precipitated by the need to keep up with their kids and their technology-driven world and relationships.

The great majority of U.S. adults still read newspaper media content, but they read it across multiple media platforms. One hundred fifty-eight million adults are currently consuming newspaper media across platforms (nonmobile), or 67% of U.S. adults, and 164 million are reading their news across platforms (including mobile), or 60% of the adult population. Nearly 34 million adults accessed content from a newspaper source from tablets and smartphones in a typical month. Six million adults are “mobile only,” using their mobile device to take in their newspaper. Almost half, or 47%, of the newspaper mobile-exclusive audience is aged 18-34. Only 4% is 65 or older.

The median age of adults who watch live television hovers around 50 years old, and the