

Growing Enrollment Through Retention and Acquisition: A Strategic Plan for Concordia International School Hanoi

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod founded Concordia International School Hanoi in August 2011. Concordia Hanoi is the first Christian school to open in Vietnam in the past 50 years. The school serves expatriate and Vietnamese nationals in the city of Hanoi. In four years Concordia has grown from forty-two students to 202 students at the end of the 2014-2015 school year (Figure 1). Concordia's student population is diverse with students currently representing 22 countries and speaking 9 different native languages. The majority of the students are from an Asian ethnic background, but the school determines student diversity by passport.

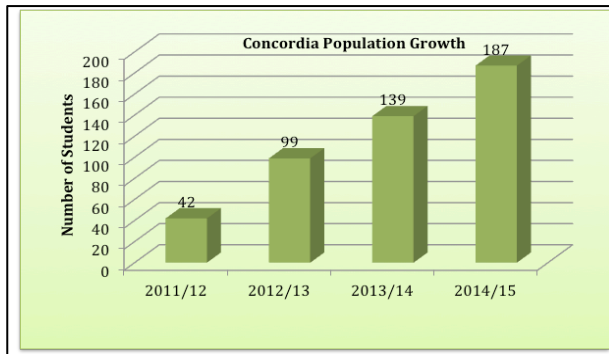


Figure 1 (Oct 2014)

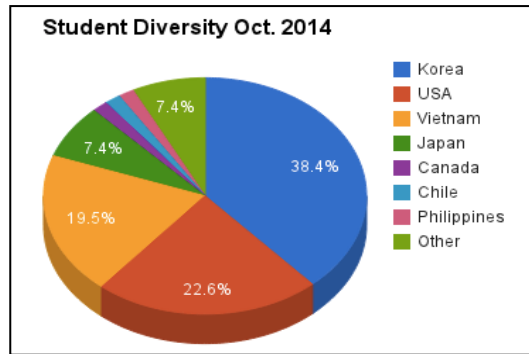


Figure 2

Concordia International School Hanoi, like most international schools in Asia, has a very high departure rate when compared with schools in the United States. The average student spends 3.6 years an international school in Asia before leaving the country for a new posting or to return to home country. With a transient population the average school loses twenty-two percent of their student body annually. Concordia Hanoi has lost an average of fourteen percent per year. While better than the average, it creates a real challenge for schools that desire to grow their enrollment verse just maintaining enrollment. Finally, Hanoi has seen an explosion of international schools in the past 5 years with six schools opening.

Asia is the fastest growing international school market in the world. The international school system is made up of schools of varying curriculum models (American, International Baccalaureate-IB, British). In addition, the ownership and governance structures are also highly diverse. Forty-nine percent of the international schools in Asia are for-profit, the remainder are founded by embassies, NGOs, and religious organization. The governance models vary from parent elected boards to hybrid parent/appointed to self-perpetuating to no board, owner run schools. This diversity gives parents and students enormous choice when selecting a school. It also requires schools know who they are, why they are serving in a particular market, and what type of students they will serve.

Strategic Action

In the development of a strategic plan for enrollment, Concordia first stepped back and re-evaluated the mission and educational goals for the school. This exercise served as an important step in determining who we are, why we are in Vietnam, and what are the goals of the organization. Concordia through a board and staff workshop reaffirmed the school mission, values, and goals.

Our Mission

At Concordia, students, teachers, and parents are dedicated to academics, creativity, spiritual development, and service in a caring and engaging community of learners discovering their talents as scholars, artists, and athletes.

Our Vision

To be the premier international school in Vietnam and a well-connected relational community committed to learning, respect for others and service.

Our Values

Community: We are passionately committed to building a strong, healthy community with each other, students, families, and the people of Vietnam.

Excellence: We are passionately committed to achieve the greatest level of excellence in education and everything we do; being highly professional, innovative, creative and effective.

Service: We are passionately committed to providing outstanding service learning opportunities for our students and families throughout the community.

Students-Centered: We are passionately committed to placing the needs of students at the forefront of our decisions.

Spiritual Development: We are passionately committed to helping students growing in their faith journey.

Our Goals

1. Prepare the students to excel at U.S. universities of their choice

2. Share the gospel message with our students, families, staff, and the boarder Vietnamese community

Through this exercise, Concordia developed a two-pronged approach to enrollment: acquisition or the recruitment of new students and retention of currently enrolled students.

Retention

With a population that transitions in and out of the country and schools at a much higher rate than the United States, retention rates will be higher. The school worked with parents in two areas involving retention. The first was parent satisfaction and the second area was the long-term goals that these families have for their child's university experience. Will their child attend a university in their home country; will they attend a university in North America, or a third location? Through multiple surveys and focus groups the school was able to identify what our families were looking for in a school and ways that we as a school could meet their needs. While the order varied slightly depending on the specific nationality, the top areas of importance in selecting an international school in Hanoi are:

1. A strong academics that emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration, especially in the sciences and math
2. A strong English language program for non native English speakers
3. A rich and diverse program that includes extra curricular and after school activities
4. Native English speaking teachers who are from North America
5. An American curriculum

Our families valued a sense of community and belonging as somewhat important. Families in general rated spiritual or character development as somewhat unimportant.

The school brought in an outside consultant to review the schools overall academic program in comparison to the other international schools in both Hanoi and the region. The consultant found that from an academic rigor standpoint, Concordia has the strongest academic program in the areas of student test scores on standardized test, curriculum, English language proficiency, and instructor qualification when compared with school in Vietnam. The consultant found Concordia weaker than its primary competitors in Hanoi in the areas of facilities and the breadth of programs offered. Finally the consultant reviewed international school data for the region to assist the school in determining what should be appropriate goals for the school to set in the areas of student population breakouts, facility needs, retention, and growth.

Finally, the school learned that tuition expenses are a significant burden for some of the families that attend Concordia International School Hanoi. Currently, the school's tuition is between 18,000 – 24,000 USD annually. Most families in the school have this expense covered by the company, but Concordia is not a viable option for many of the families in our community, especially those families with multiple children or families who are engaged in mission activities.

ACQUISITION

Concordia seeks to grow the school enrollment in overall numbers; more closely balance our nationalities, and limited the number of non-native speaking students needing significant language support. The Van Lunen project was important in clarifying our current processes and programs, identifying the needs of the school, and developing the implementation plan.

The school hired Tom Southworth, a former head of admissions for the Loomis Chaffee School. Mr. Southworth has extensive experience in student recruitment, the Asian market and the management and structure of a high quality admission office. Mr. Southworth led the school through a year-long study and planning session in 2014. Through this process the school identified goals for the future, created an admissions team, and identified ways to reach out into the community. Finally, we defined the acquisition cycle and develop action plans for each level.

The acquisition of students involves several important steps:

1. Creating a brand awareness in the broader community
2. Drive students and families to the campus
3. Getting families to submit an application
4. Test students to identify which students meet the school needs
5. Upon acceptance work with families to finalize enrollment

Concordia hired Tim Winterstein, an American with extensive school admission, development, and marketing experience in the U.S. to head up the admission office. In addition, we hired on a Japanese admissions counselor and a Korean admissions counselor to focus exclusively on each of those communities. These new staff members joined our current admission and marketing



counselor. These changes allowed our school to focus more directly on our key demographic markets and expanded our branding and communications with both the school and the community.

In creating the brand awareness within our community, the school developed a comprehensive plan to reach out to the community through multiple sources. Concordia became members of multiple chambers of commerce, including the American, Australian, European, and Vietnamese. Various staff members regularly attend meetings and functions hosted by each of the groups. In the Hanoi Korean and Japanese communities, the schooling decision is driven by the mother, so Concordia supports and sponsors activities for both of these women's clubs on campus. The school is updating all school materials, establishing branding guidelines, updating the website, launching internal parent and teacher websites, and creating print ads in a variety of magazines, papers and sites. While each of these will help the school brand its self more effectively, word of mouth continues to be the most successful way for Concordia to grow the student population. In the fall of 2015, Concordia will add a Director of Community Outreach. This position will be responsible for meeting with embassies and business to promote the Concordia as an option for expatriates arriving into Hanoi.

The admissions team has undergone extensive training in meeting with prospective families, assessing family needs, and selling the benefits of Concordia to parents and students. The admission team also learned how to assess students in Preschool through grade 5. For students in 6th – 12th grade the school moved to the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT). Both processes have allowed the school to better identify student needs and abilities and match the students who needs abilities match the schools abilities and goals.

Finally, the school has dramatically improved our closure rate with families. We believe this is primarily related to the training and new staff who are able to offer a first class enrollment experience.

Through the Van Lunen Fellowship process, Concordia Hanoi has positioned our school to grow and meet the needs of our

Goals Produced from Van Lunen Project

- By 2020, Concordia will have a population break of North American – 30%, Korean – 25%, Vietnamese – 20%, Other – 15%, Japanese – 10%

- By 2018, Concordia student's English language capacity (using the WIDA language assessment tools) will be 60% - level 6 (native speaker acquisition level), 25% - level 5, and 15% - level 4.
- By August 2016 Concordia will construct a state of the art facilities that will meet the needs of a growing and diverse population. These facilities will include classrooms, offices, canteen, science, art, and music spaces, gymnasium, indoor and outdoor student play/gathering areas, and athletic fields.
- By 2020, Concordia will provide a scholarship fund for students with financial need. Concordia will set aside eight percent of the school's annual tuition income into a scholarship fund for students who demonstrated a financial need.
- By 2018, the school's student retention level will be 5% less than the 5 year Hanoi average.
- By 2017, Concordia will have a positive student gain from each of the international schools in Hanoi. (Student gain is defined as the difference between students who leave Concordia for another Hanoi international school vs. students who come to Concordia from another international school)
- Enrollment goals:
 - 2015 – 2016: 235 students
 - 2016 – 2017: 280 students
 - 2017 – 2018: 325 students
 - 2018 – 2019: 360 students
 - 2019 – 2020: 390 students