Applied School Project: IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT
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Van Lunen Fellows Program 2018

The Problem

Admissions results have been dropping off steadily at both of our high schools since peaking around 2001. Retention has remained relatively stable and strong for our type of schools (mid 90% range). Thus, it is the admissions results that have resulted in the steady declines.

This alarming trend drove me to establish reversing this as a key priority in my first year. During this year a new strategic plan was adopted by our Trustees that established the long-term priority of creating a high performing enrollment management function for our schools.

The Solution

Organizational Changes: A new enrollment management organization was established, adding a leadership and support position for financial aid while pulling together the existing Admissions Directors and International Student Coordinator positions under the new Director. The principals still play a key role but no longer are responsible for direct oversight and planning of the admissions functions and managing the performance against goals for these positions.

Process Improvements: The admissions process flow checklist tool was set up in the onCampus information system to align and then monitor each critical decision step. We established a clear admission criteria and associated scoring rubric for admissions decision-making. An admissions funnel report was created to monitor our process. Jim McKenzie, from The Rock School in Florida, was brought in to provide training and to give an assessment and recommendations to guide these changes in our admissions process and practices.

Financial Assistance Program Improvements: We transitioned to a new comprehensive process to award all forms financial assistance based upon a net-tuition approach that seeks to manage the filling of available seats (without overfilling) in balance with generating the most net tuition revenue. We also evaluated our available grants and discounts. The new matrix model divides academic merit/aptitude into five groups along one access and divides need into seven groups along the second axis. The merit distinctions accommodated the automatic application of our merit-based scholarship awards. Through data modeling, we assigned target percentage of need to be met to each cell in the matrix.

Take-away Learning

Each school is unique and doing this required deep knowledge of its practices, the trends and results based on prior data and the beliefs or philosophy about what the ideal student body would look like and why.

At its core, this project was a change management effort. I can already trace back most of the issues that we faced in the implementation of this project to failures in addressing the aspects of change management within the staff. The reality of managing this in a rolling admissions process is a tricky art. Both variables of available seats and net tuition need monitored in a dynamic, on-going process.

Results

The financial aid model will remain a work in progress and will be adjusted annually based upon the data gathered from each new class and our needs and goals established for admissions. It is too early to state our results on this piece but the current data shows that we are close to the goals for average and total net tuition.

Our two schools responded differently to this new model and processes changes. North is currently experiencing the strongest new student admissions year of the past decade. South, on the other hand, has resisted the changes and refused to adopt the new strategies needed to support enrollment growth. As a result, it is currently experiencing what could likely be the worst new student admission in the history of the school.