

RECRUITING CASE STUDY

CAST THE NET WIDE? OR CAST THE NET WELL?

SUMMARY

One of the most important decisions admissions offices face when recruiting traditional undergraduates is how to balance the need to fill the top of the funnel while still engaging students in the middle. There just are not enough resources around to devote maximal effort to both activities, and hard decisions must be made. Eduventures believes that in this era of increasing importance of fit, engaging interested students in the middle of the funnel is critical to meeting enrollment goals. In this case study we examine how one institution, Azusa Pacific University, framed this decision and built a set of tools to enhance middle-to-end of funnel engagement.

ABOUT AZUSA PACIFIC

Azusa Pacific University (APU), a comprehensive, evangelical Christian university located 26 miles northeast of Los Angeles, serves about 10,000 undergraduates. Christian faith is central to APU’s mission—after all, its school motto is “God First.”

As religiously affiliated colleges of all kinds know, the stereotypical perceptions high school-aged prospects have of their universities can prevent them from really getting to know the opportunities they offer. Christian universities are not for everyone, but they can be great choices for many open-minded students who do not connect directly to the schools’ missions. These are often students on the edge of interest for APU, the kind who can be coaxed off the fence with rich information about institutional fit.

While 80% of APU’s students identify as evangelical Christian, a healthy 20% do not. A fair proportion of these non-evangelical students are international students, giving APU a clear segment for messaging. They tell these students that while they do not have to identify as Christian, they do have to be open to understanding the historical and cultural role of Christianity. If a student is open to this idea, then they should be open to APU.

APU believes that engaging interested non-evangelical students is of primary importance and does not want to waste resources casting a wide net for these students. Therefore, the University does not use any of its precious travel resources trying to reach international non-evangelical students; those resources are reserved for relationship building with Christian networks, churches, and schools. Instead, APU builds its non-evangelical international funnel through the

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use of third-party tools like CollegeWeekLive, Chegg, and Hot courses. These “armchair recruitment tools” can generate small but interested numbers of students at reasonable costs, enabling admissions officers to then spend time engaging those students in the middle of the funnel.

For example, during the beginning of the recruitment cycle, APU focuses recruitment efforts on casting a wide net for international inquiries through participation in CollegeWeekLive’s August and November International Student Days. Then its strategy turns to engagement. The engagement tools they have developed can help all inquiries, but they are directed at enhancing recruitment of those all-important international students comprise.

Specifically, to recruit and engage effectively at a distance, APU has implemented two tools: regular chat office hours in which any question can be asked and answered, and strategic webcast sessions with content and interaction designed to express fit. They use CollegeWeekLive’s Campus Connect chat widget and Student Engagement Platform to accomplish this.

Both activities strive to optimize access to information for international students. Chat hours and webcasts are live at times that are convenient for international students. For example, 1 AM Pacific time chats in Los Angeles allow Beijing-based students to tune in live at 5 PM their time. APU believes these live opportunities to learn more and ask questions are essential to engagement.

The webcasts cover critical topics and are meant to share information when students need it most. They are also designed to build and deepen relationships, and explicate further the notion that a non-evangelical student could be embraced by, and learn from, an evangelical Christian college community. Some topics are necessarily transactional, like learning about the admissions process, but all touch on the elements of community that students will want to understand to properly assess fit. In addition, sessions are supported by a variety of campus voices, from academic and student affairs to current students and alumni. For more information about the sessions, see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Schedule and content

Date	Details
1: August	Inquiry focus, what makes APU Distinctive?
2: November	Early action focus, scholarship information and application completion
3: January	Regular application scholarship information and application completion
4: May	Deposit deadline, next steps for admitted students, APU welcome activities for International students and support services.
5 & 6: Jun/July	Preparing for APU, housing, four year plan, what it takes to graduate (offered twice to give maximum access to international students)

APU’s work is ongoing; this approach is only in its second full year of implementation. Feedback has been positive thus far. APU’s admissions staff says they are better able to reach and engage the interested pool in the middle of the funnel. They can connect in real-time and on topics that

are meaningful to individual students, rather than waste time simply cold calling, and feel they are doing important work encouraging these students to apply and ultimately select APU. In the end, conversion rates of international students from inquiry to application will tell the story about the relative success of their efforts.

The biggest challenge engaging international students remains around working across time zones. To fill out the non-evangelical student population, APU is committed to the sacrifice it takes to make a personal connection with these students. Just recently, they have expanded chat office hours at the two ends of the day, morning and evening, when they can speak to international students in different parts of the world. In the future, they will refine and add to the curriculum of content and interaction available to international students through webcasts.

*What's the most important lesson APU has already learned? Don't waste your time and money looking for those needle-in-a-haystack students by casting a wide net over and over again. Discipline yourself to limit those activities and spend your time wisely in converting students who have expressed interest. In other words, cast the net *well* and follow through with an engagement strategy.*

ABOUT EDUVENTURES

Eduventures for Higher Education Leaders provides data, research, and advice to support decision-making throughout the student lifecycle. Higher education leaders engage with Eduventures to make informed decisions on setting strategy, ensuring the financial sustainability of their institutions, boosting student success, and selecting and implementing technology solutions. Our research, recommendations, and personalized support enable clients to understand the top traits of leaders in critical disciplines and to evaluate new technological opportunities.

ABOUT NRCCUA

The National Research Center for College & University Admissions™ (NRCCUA®) is an educational data platform and research organization based in Lee's Summit, Missouri, and Austin, Texas. For 44 years, NRCCUA has been a leading provider of data, technology and programs servicing public and private colleges and universities to enhance their marketing and recruiting efforts. These solutions represent the link between students making important life decisions and providing the resources and information they need to succeed in their postsecondary education and career. NRCCUA is part of Sterling Partners' Education Opportunity Fund.

More about Eduventures can be found at www.eduventures.com and www.nrccua.org.

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