

# Recruitment & Retention During the COVID-19 Crisis

## Tips for Enrollment Managers

"A disturbing number of prospective students (one in six respondents) appear to be near the point of giving up on the idea of attending a four-year college or university as a full-time student in the fall," notes a student poll published by Art & Science Group. Further, "an additional two-thirds of graduating seniors are currently concerned that they may have to change their first-choice school due to COVID-19."



During the coronavirus pandemic and its fallout, what can enrollment managers do to **maximize recruitment and retention** at institutions of higher education?



## Ten Recruiting Tips for 2020

### 01 Always Be Communicating

Foremost, keep communications going with your admitted students—even if it's just a “we’re checking on you” message. For example:

- **Email prospective students frequently.** Students have shifted their opinions on communication during this time, and many say they would like their communications to be email and to hear from schools more than once a week. It's time to ramp up your communication machines and get the messages out!
- **Have campus leadership engage with these students and communicate fall plans.** While students want to predominately hear from their admissions counselor, they also want to hear from school leadership. Students who have been planning to attend college have been working on this for some time, but they are dealing with many unknowns—let them in on your plans and it will give them reassurance of a future that includes your institution.
- **Have financial aid officers reach out to all students.** Keep in mind that the impact on the economy may have significantly impacted student/parent's ability to pay for college, and do not assume that the student who was a full-pay student is still a full-pay student. Know if your institution can offer any additional assistance to students who may have been hit hard by the financial impact of COVID-19.
- **Make information easy to find.** Create a dedicated page on your website for all updates related to COVID-19 and its impact to the campus and community. This will make it easy for students to keep up to date without having to check multiple sources for the latest information.



### 02 Remove Roadblocks

Remove the obstacles that can hinder applicants this spring. For example:

- **Waive testing requirements** as students cannot get tested during this time.
- **Accept unofficial transcripts** from students whose schools are shut down.
- **Waive or reduce application fees/enrollment deposits**—many families have unexpected expenses or suffered a loss or reduction of income during the crisis.

### 03 Extend Deadlines

It's an uncertain time for students and their families, and they may need more time to consider what they want to do. A recent [article by Carnegie Dartlet](#) (reporting on 4,848 high school seniors surveyed) notes, “Two-thirds of students say a May 1 deadline is unrealistic.” Provide extensions to deadlines—if you push them for a decision before they are comfortable, it may be “No.”

### 04 Expect Early Decision Changes

Be prepared for some Early Decision students to ask to be released from their agreement. Students are second-guessing their decision to attend their first-choice school—perhaps due to financial concerns or fear of the unknown. Parents (and students for that matter) may feel less inclined to travel far from home. Expect that your out-of-state numbers could dip slightly. Be understanding and don't add to the stress students are already under.

## 05 Plan for Online-only Orientations

Many schools already have one for international students, but now it the time to put together a great online orientation program for your incoming Fall 2020 class. Create signup forms so students can reserve a time with an advisor online to register for classes. Many campus ID systems can use an uploaded photo to generate their student ID. Take as many paper processes online as you are able. Give your students something positive to focus on during this time!

## 06 Schedule Online Meetings

Create and schedule some online meetings:

- Schedule a Zoom “Admitted Student Gathering” meeting. Perhaps schedule them for different regions so students can meet those near them. Set some guidelines, for example: No discussion of COVID-19, only discussing the school and the students’ future plans for attending.
- Also, engage faculty members who are at home to reach out to students using Zoom or similar technologies.
- Create scheduled webinars where students can ask questions in a group setting.

## 07 Expand Virtual Campus

The same [article by Carnegie Dartlet](#) goes on to suggest, “students will choose a school without visiting, but you better have a good virtual option.” Create detailed residence hall tours with specific room dimensions. Since most schools are closed to visitors, incoming students cannot plan their room layout with their family. Additional details and visuals will help them “see” their future living space.

## 08 Defer Enrollment for Gap Years

Many students may be considering taking a gap year—either for financial reasons or due to the uncertainty of their situation. Encourage them to defer their enrollment and keep them engaged throughout the year. As this situation improves, consider allowing students to enroll in the spring.

## 09 Offer Support & Counseling

Be prepared for students who may have lost a loved one due to this virus. Be ready to engage your support systems for students who may be entering your school who have lost someone to COVID-19.

## 10 Note What Works

Finally, note the things that worked well enough to continue doing once this crisis passes. There are many tools and techniques that schools are having to develop during this time, and some can be useful post-COVID-19. Document what you have done so if there is a resurgence, your institution can quickly re-implement those processes.





## Five Retention Tips for 2020

### 01 Engage Students

As with recruiting, one of the best ways to ensure that students *return* is to continue to engage with them. Reach out to them not just in mass emails or social media posts, but with individual engagement from faculty and staff.

One of a school's greatest assets for retention can be staff members that normally see the students every day—having familiar people call them to check up on them, to see how they and their families are doing, and telling students that we look forward to seeing them back on campus can go a long way in making students feel like they are still part of your institution's community.

### 02 Keep Clubs Meeting

Encourage clubs and organizations to continue to meet. Make sure that organization leaders have the tools and technology they need to continue to meet with their members so their affinity groups on campus are maintained while away.

### 03 Have Leadership Reach Out to Parents

For example, have your school president call families and ask them “What more can we do for you?” Some institutions are setting up emergency funding for students that may be experiencing financial hardships during this time, and the recently passed CARES Act includes many financial aid elements. Let families know what your school is doing and how they can apply for assistance.

### 04 Reduce or Waive Fees When Possible

As with recruiting new students, consider a reduction or waiver of miscellaneous fees that existing students have paid in the past. Such concessions help families that have had additional expenses during this time and ensure students can continue their education.

### 05 Accommodate Social Distancing and Self-quarantine

Students may still have concerns about social distancing when they return to campus. Put procedures in place for students who are ill to be able to self-quarantine in their room and join classes via video sessions rather than always attending in person.





## Five Recruiting Tips for 2021

### 01 Engage Students

*Begin planning now* for social distancing protocols that may still be in place this fall. If college fairs and high school visits are not conducted in person, what alternative methods can you employ to reach out to these students?

### 02 Start Conversions Over Video and Text

Host chats via video or text. These need to be a mixture of admissions counselor-led and student-led chats where students can connect and ask the questions they would normally ask in person. You should offer both group and individual sessions for privacy.

### 03 Expand Your Virtual Tour

Create a virtual tour—not the basic “we really want you to come and see us in person tour,” but a well-executed video tour of your campus, including residence hall rooms and dining facilities. Show life on campus is still exciting and enjoyable!

### 04 Email Updates and Status

Ramp up your email outreach. Students’ perspectives are shifting to wanting more communication than in the recent past. The [Carnegie Dartlet survey](#) asked students how often they want to hear from colleges and universities in the coming months: **67 percent said daily to once a week.**

That is likely more frequent communications than schools have typically provided, and many students now would like to be contacted via emails, so give them weekly updates on the status of the campus.

### 05 Tap Alumni

Draft your alumni to assist in recruiting. If your state is still under a shelter-in-place order in the fall, but other states are not, utilize your alumni to help you recruit in those areas. Consider reaching out to former recruiters who now reside in those states who may be willing and able to help, at least on an interim basis, in those areas.

## About Dynamic Campus

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Dynamic Campus offers 49 years of cumulative higher education recruiting and CRM experience, allowing us to effectively meet your strategic enrollment objectives in addition to your immediate tactical needs, serving as a true trusted partner as well as an effective technical resource.

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