Chapter 15
Orchestrating an Enrollment Management Transformation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case chronicles the beginnings of an enrollment management transformation currently underway at The Extended Campuses of Northern Arizona University. After flat enrollments for three plus years, the organization executed a phased plan to alter the university's enrollment trajectory. A complete reorganization, an intentional effort to operationalize enrollment marketing best practice, and the establishment of a data-driven organization comprise the foundations of the first phase of the plan. While specific to Northern Arizona University, the case will also highlight six foundations for initiating any enrollment management transformational journey.

SETTING THE STAGE

As an online program administrator, what's your answer to stable but stalled enrollment numbers for three plus years? You're a recruiter and the event you attended last year with 15 other educational institutions has 20 in attendance this year. Now put yourself in the role of a regent who sees the need to increase degree attainment

levels for their state in order to remain viable and economically attractive. Maybe you can relate to a president of a state institution, who has for years been serving the educational needs of residents through a vast network of community campuses, but sees the higher educational landscape changing.

Take each of those scenarios, add to them the relevant facts and figures and you'll see the landscape surrounding The Extended Campuses of Northern Arizona University. Enrollments were flat, the market within the state was becoming hyper-competitive, aggressive national and local growth goals had been established to be competitive, something had to change.

So, what was the plan?

This case will chronicle the first phase of an enrollment management transformation called "Project Orchestrate." The two primary goals of Project Orchestrate are enrollment growth and learner success.

At this point, you might be thinking…just set an enrollment target and a retention goal and you're on your way! Why transform? Why invest resources in this way? Why invest in the infrastructure that no one really sees? We believe that to realize sustained results over time, the place where you invest is in your people, business processes and technology. Simply setting a target or a goal based on last year's outcome is not enough in today's hyper-competitive higher education landscape. Our enrollment management operation needed to be strategic, systemic, scalable and sustainable.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Northern Arizona University (NAU), located in Flagstaff, Arizona, is a public institution serving approximately 26,000 students. NAU's focus on an undergraduate residential experience is strengthened by a robust professional and continuing education unit, Extended Campuses (EC).

Over 30 years ago, EC became the conduit by which academic programs were accessible at a distance from the Flagstaff campus. With a median age of 32, learners served by EC complete undergraduate and graduate degrees in seven distinct degree categories or disciplines (e.g., arts and humanities, business and administration, computing and technology, education and counseling, health professions, math and science, social science including intelligence studies, justice studies and public administration). Over the years the number of academic programs grew to accommodate the market needs of the day. Today, approximately 1/3 of the total NAU enrollments are learners completing coursework through EC either in a classroom away from the campus in Flagstaff, and/or online.

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