



WHITEPAPER

Six Steps to Developing a Holistic Enrollment Strategy

Every college and university have unique qualities that draw students into its admissions funnel. Changing market conditions, new financial aid regulations, and evolving perceptions of higher education in recent years are prompting many institutions to re-evaluate their recruiting strategies. We are at a pivotal time in higher education where individualized strategies are necessary for enrolling a healthy cohort of new students, but resources are tight so this has to be done in the most efficient way possible.

Why are students interested in enrolling at your institution and what barriers to entry may be hindering them from doing so?

Enrollment Strategy

Just tracking your student funnel through dashboards and reporting numbers will not inform your institution to move the needle on enrollment. We have developed this six-step framework to better understand your students and inform your strategy.

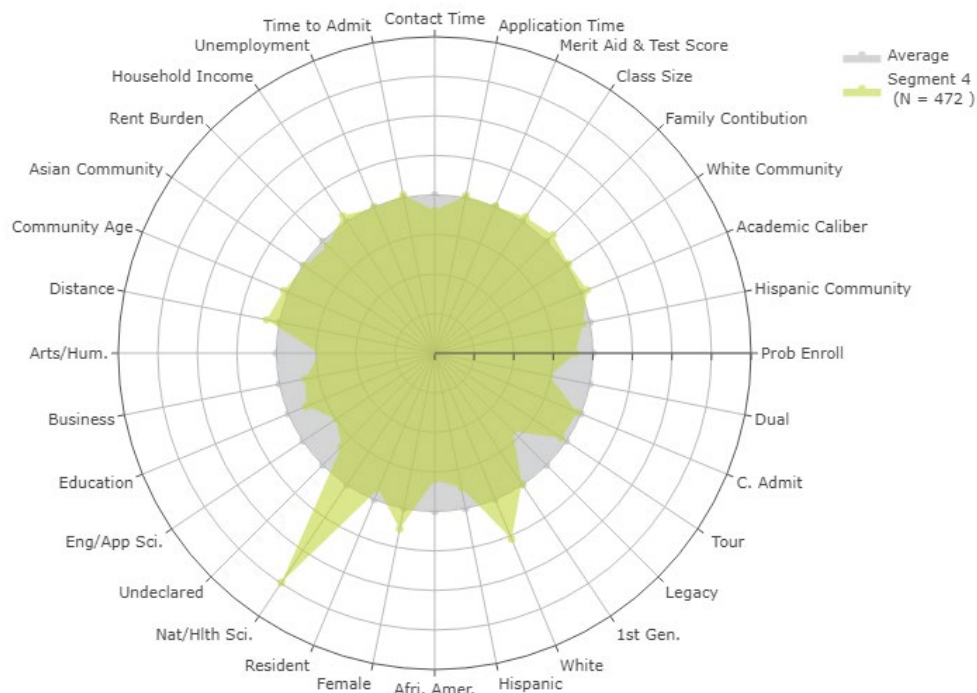
1. Understand your institution's market position and differentiation

The SightLine team always recommends starting with a market and benchmarking analysis to understand where your institution sits in the market compared to the general region and direct competitors. Often times this analysis aligns your entire leadership team's understanding of market position, institution caliber, brand influence, and price competitiveness. This also allows us to begin identifying differentiators that may make your institution stand out from your top competitors that should be leveraged in branding and messaging.

2. Use student segmentation to understand types of students that are a good fit at your institution

You probably have good intuition about the groups of students that are more likely or less likely to enroll at your institution. A student segmentation analysis will likely verify your previous understanding and will draw out additional insights. A student segmentation analysis is used to identify and quantitatively describe groups of students that have similar characteristics and may have similar enrollment patterns.

The following figure demonstrates a segment of 472 students at a public institution in the southeast region that consisted primarily of female, non-resident applicants to the Natural and Health Sciences department, with above average academic caliber, and below average enrollment yield rate. Out-of-state student recruitment had previously been overlooked at this institution because it seemed to be too broad to develop a targeted strategy. This segmentation revealed a group of applicants that could benefit from one cohesive engagement strategy.



Enrollment Strategy

3. Evaluate areas of focus to move the needle for specific student segments

For each student segment, we consider what barriers may be hindering students throughout the admissions funnel. For the particular segment described above, we hypothesized that there may be more affordable health sciences programs in surrounding states, particularly for nursing programs. Additionally, this institution was seeing significantly lower female enrollment rates and we found they were lacking female-focused messaging and branding. This led us to conduct a more specific price sensitivity analysis focused on nursing programs in surrounding states and develop targeted, strategic scholarships and messaging for this student segment.

4. Gain student and parent perspective to enhance understanding

In addition to data analysis and student segmentation, we recommend learning from students and parents from the student segments identified. We conduct third party, randomized, anonymous interviews to understand the perception of recent applicants. Third party interviews are more flexible than surveys and allow the student or parent to feel more open to providing negative feedback, which is at times the most useful feedback an institution can hear. The student voice is a very powerful message to incorporate into any student engagement strategy.

5. Select two or three engagement strategies to focus on

Using student segmentation to identify some larger groups of students that would most benefit from additional outreach or engagement allows the institution to truly target resources efficiently. This makes it easier to pick two to three initiatives to work on during each enrollment cycle, without overburdening staff.

6. Perform A/B testing and evaluate the effectiveness of each strategy

Each strategy should be randomly applied to a portion of a given student segment to understand the true impact of the strategy. This is called A/B testing where we measure the change in enrollment rates for students who received the engagement outreach, compared to those who did not. This will allow the institution to fine-tune the strategy in the enrollment cycle, or select an entirely different student segment to focus resources on. In some cases, depending on what the engagement strategy is, it would be unethical to offer resources to some students but not others that have the same qualifications. In this case, all students should receive the same resources and retrospective interviews can be used to quantify the impact, though this is a less rigorous approach.

As an enrollment, admissions, or financial aid leader at your institution, you have a great understanding of your students but prioritizing strategies and resource allocation is difficult. That is why we use data, advance analytical methods, and the student voice to inform your strategy. Interested in learning more? [Contact us](#) to see how SightLine's data modeling can help your institution.

About SightLine: SightLine is a boutique analytics firm, providing easy to interpret, student-centric predictive analytics solutions without the need for complex software. We support colleges and universities throughout the entire student lifecycle, using data to answer the complex questions that institutions have about how to support students.