Increasing Enrollment and Higher Education Degree Attainment Among Maine’s Adult Population – A Strategic Investment Fund Proposal for Marketing Support

A Strategic Investment Fund Proposal
2011-2012
University of Maine System

President: Dr. Selma Botman
Areas Involved: Marketing
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This proposal requests $300,000 of Strategic Investment Funds over two years in order to increase USM marketing to effectively grow enrollments of working adults. New marketing strategies will be designed to bring new students into current undergraduate and graduate programs as well as new degree completion and non-degree programs. This pilot program will develop new marketing approaches to supplement existing marketing outreach of the USM continuing and professional education division, achieve the adult student recruitment goals of the USM Enrollment Council, and work under the umbrella of the current USM brand awareness campaign: “USM...Connecting You with Tomorrow.” After the initial two-year period, we expect that increased enrollments and tuition revenues would enable USM to continue the adult student marketing efforts on a self-sustaining basis.

1. Overview

Maine’s adult population, and therefore its workforce, lags behind our neighboring New England states in terms of the percentage of those with college degrees. The percentage of our working adults with college degrees is 37% vs. the 47% New England average (Maine Compact 2010) despite Maine’s relatively strong high school graduation rates. As the
Compact report (2010) indicates, in order for Maine to match the projected New England proportion of working age adults with a college degree (56% by 2020) we must produce or attract an additional 40,000 degree holders over the next 10 years (over and above the 120,000 degree holders Maine is projected to produce with no other intervention -- Compact report 2010). That is what it will take for Maine to be competitive for industries or businesses that require a modern-day workforce to meet their standards of employment.

Educational attainment, particularly at the baccalaureate level and above, is limiting Maine’s capacity for growth. Recent meetings with CEOs of major employers in our region (Wright Express, Unum, TDBank, Idexx, Hannaford, and Maine Health) concluded that higher education attainment is the key factor limiting business growth, and their number one common concern. USM is currently working with these employers to identify areas of future career potential and opportunities to work together to build the pipeline for growth.

Studies indicate, however, that Maine will not be able to produce those 40,000 additional college degree holders or meet the future workforce needs simply by improving the rate of completion by traditional students (age 18 – 24, - Noel and Levitz report) that’s why it will be essential to significantly increase the number of adult workers that enter degree-granting programs at Maine’s colleges and universities – particularly at public universities, where access and affordability are manageable for busy, place-bound and modest-income adults.

**Meeting USM Enrollment Management Goals**

With declining populations projected in Maine’s traditional, college-aged prospects, enrollments at Maine’s Public Universities will decline unless new segments are effectively recruited, enrolled and retained.

A *Market Decisions* study, completed for USM in Spring 2010 and based on data on education levels in Maine and census data, estimates that there are 67,000 individuals in southern Maine (York, Cumberland, Androscoggin, and Sagadahoc Counties) between the ages of 20 and 59 who have not completed a Bachelor’s Degree and who are not currently enrolled in a degree program. On a broad strokes basis, this prior study confirms that the prospect pool is of sufficient size to warrant increased marketing by USM to working adults as a strategy to increase enrollments.

The budgets and other resources available for enrollment management at USM are already fully utilized and stretched to the limit in our efforts to maintain current student enrollments. They do not allow for the development and testing of new media strategies to effectively reach the Adult Student market – the population that must make up an increasingly important segment of our student population.
The Maine marketplace, and specifically the most-heavily populated Southern and Central Maine region, is experiencing an enormous increase in competitive activity for enrollment recruitment, as is the nation as a whole. Many classes of competitors are making significant investments to fill seats in classrooms and to enroll students in online and blended academic programs. The rise of for-profit organizations such as Kaplan University, which recently acquired Andover College in Maine, and the national marketing powerhouse, the University of Phoenix, are just two examples of competitors for certain Adult Student segments. Private colleges and universities such as St. Joseph’s College, University of New England and Southern New Hampshire University have become aggressive in their marketing of online or blended on-campus and online degree and non-degree programs. Most notable is the partnership strategy that St. Joseph’s College has adopted to provide academic programming with Maine’s Community Colleges and local organizations such as the Portland Police Department. We must increase our media visibility in order to remain competitive, and we must do it in a strategic, targeted and effective approach if we want to succeed in growing our enrollments at USM.

The proposed budget will support development of a strategic marketing and media plan, the production of creative assets to use in electronic, online and other marketing approaches and the purchase of media that will help us to test, refine and operate adult student enrollment recruitment programs over a two-year period.

This proposal anticipates the use of interactive online tools and specifically targeted web content, multi-media and communications outreach, using traditional (including broadcast and print exposure) and online media and social media campaigns and public relations initiatives to engage adult student prospects, and help them find, enroll (and ultimately complete) the right programs for their career and personal development needs.

By enacting strategic and measured marketing efforts to communicate the undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs that are uniquely offered by Maine’s only regional comprehensive university, in coordination with programming, delivery and services being developed at USM specifically with the working adult in mind, we can increase enrollment of adult students. Increased tuition revenues will enable us to make new targeted adult-oriented marketing efforts self-sustaining over time.

Objectives

- Define, segment and quantify the Adult Student market in a specified geographic region
- Determine “Needs, Motivations, Barriers” of key segments
- Test and refine Marketing, Communications and Enrollment Recruitment strategies and programs to scale up for ongoing implementation.
• Produce, purchase and evaluate media campaigns designed to target the working adult student population
• Design evaluative criteria for adult student recruitment efforts and for return-on-investment considerations for USM.

2. University

Enrollment growth can only be achieved through cross-functional efforts and alignment around key goals and objectives. This marketing proposal is the responsibility of Meg Weston, Vice President of Advancement who has the office of Marketing and Brand Management reporting to her, working in coordination with other USM resources including:

   University Leadership

   Enrollment Management Team including Enrollment Management Council

   Marketing and Public Communications Leadership

   Student Success Leadership Team

   Division of Continuing and Professional Education

   Provost and Academic Leadership

   Outside Consultants including the University’s Enrollment Management, Marketing and Research Consultants

   USM Board of Visitors, Corporate Partners and other USM Advisory Boards

In addition, external resources will be consulted as the plan is developed, potentially including:

   The Mitchell Institute, the Compact For Higher Education, the Maine Development Foundation, The Maine Adult Education Association, The Maine Chamber of Commerce, the Maine Community Foundation, Greater Portland Chamber of Commerce, (the other chambers of the region) Portland Adult Education (and other Adult Ed organizations)

3. The Plan: Implementation

a. Outcomes:
   o Depth of understanding of adult student behavior including needs, motivations, barriers and decision-making cycles regarding educational opportunities.
   o Development of effective marketing strategies and tactics proven to be successful in recruitment of working adults.
   o Increased media exposure and awareness of USM offerings among target population.
b. Milestones:

**Year 1:**
Following the completion of benchmarking, research and segmentation analysis, test messaging, communications and marketing materials and programs and supporting tools, and implement Phase 1 of Pilot Enrollment Recruitment Marketing Campaign.

This work includes:

Understanding “Needs, Motivations, Barriers” for working adults.

Testing messaging and communications and marketing tools and programs

Producing creative assets and purchasing electronic, online and offline media targeted to this market.

Evaluating Phase 1 program results

**Year 2:**

Revise and refine messaging and communications and Enrollment Recruitment Campaign programs

Implement larger-scale, Phase 2 Enrollment Recruitment Campaign

Measure and evaluate program effectiveness

Complete revisions to the ongoing USM Strategic Marketing Plan.

4. **Project’s relationship to New Challenges, New Directions:**

Clearly for Maine to meet the demands of a competitive workforce and growing economy, higher education plays a critical role. As UMS seeks to define and get broad-based support for Maine’s “public agenda,” institutions such as USM need to be able to deliver on the promise of increasing the number of educated, professional working adults in our state.

At the same time, as the NC/ND work plan states, increasing enrollment during a time of economic downturn and demographic decline is challenging. USM needs to develop new understanding, new strategies and new tools to be able to expand our recruitment efforts and build enrollments to meet Maine’s needs and at the same time increase USM’s financial sustainability.
5. Requested Investment:

Year 1:

Following the completion of benchmarking, research and segmentation analysis, create a strategic marketing plan for the two-year project, test messaging, communications and marketing materials and programs and supporting tools, and implement Phase 1 of Pilot Enrollment Recruitment Marketing Campaign.

This work includes:

- Understanding “Needs, Motivations and Barriers” to Adult Student enrollments
  $15,000

- Development of Strategic Marketing Plan including Communications and Media Plan and Messaging/Creative Platform
  $20,000

- Test messaging and communications of the marketing approach
  $15,000

Implementing Phase 1 of Enrollment Recruitment Marketing campaign

- Final development and production of communications materials
  $20,000

- Media expenditures, online and offline
  $80,000

Total Year 1 Expenditures: $150,000

Year 2:

Based on the learnings from the Year 1 program research and development, and the measurement and evaluation of initial program results, Year 2 will focus on refinement and revision of communications and marketing materials and programs, and a larger-scale
implementation of the Enrollment Recruitment Marketing Campaign, with the majority of the budget dedicated to media and communications outreach.

- Revise and refine messaging and communications and Enrollment Recruitment Campaign programs
  $15,000

- Implement larger-scale, Phase 2 Enrollment Recruitment Campaign including online and offline media expenditures
  $135,000

Total Year 2 Expenditures:  $150,000

Total, Years 1 and 2:  $300,000

SIF funding will be used to complement and build creative synergies with existing USM marketing efforts of Community Outreach and Graduate Studies. USM will support the adult student marketing recruitment effort through the efforts of personnel in the office of Marketing and Brand Management and the Division of Professional and Continuing Education. The integrated marketing budget will fund brand advertising that raises awareness of USM in the Community and among all targeting student populations, and the Professional and Continuing Education outreach programs will focus the catalog and direct mail marketing in ways that work synergistically with the specific marketing efforts funded by this proposal. The USM “match” from these efforts is estimated to be $331,362 in each of the years funding is requested.

The success of this initiative will result in increased enrollment and tuition revenues, enabling USM to increase the size and scope of our central marketing budget in year three by $150,000 to continue the program.
Application for Strategic Investment Funds (SIF) for FY2012 (July 1, 2011 - June 30, 2012) Submitted by: Meg Weston Phone: 207-780-4708

Campus: UM UMA UMF UMFK UMM UMPI USM SWS

(If more than one campus will participate in the project, check the box of the campus that will be responsible for administering the funds)

This request is for (check one box only):

- [x] a NEW project that will start on July 1, 2011.
- [ ] ADDITIONAL funds to be added to EXISTING SIF award project #:

The proposed project manager is: Meg Weston

The title of the NEW proposed project is: Marketing Support to Increasee Enrollment and Degree Attainment

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In the SIF application narrative, describe any potential financial impact on other system universities, e.g., revenue / savings / costs.