



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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AN ENROLLMENT BAR—A SOLUTION FOR YOUR CAMPUS?

What options are available when obstacles get in the way of your college creating one-stop shops? For San Jacinto College (SJC), the obstacles were lack of funding, facility and space limitations, and timing delays related to the future development of a master plan and construction program. Rather than put the project on hold, the leaders of enrollment management and student development were determined to locate resources for best-practice reviews and to build enrollment bars as a mid-term solution.

The Situation

The college was not providing an appropriate level of enrollment services to students. This situation was especially alarming as more low-income, first-generation, and minority students were being served. These students are less familiar with the rules and regulations of college, the time demands required to be successful in college, and the need to identify a career and education pathway. The traditional enrollment services model at the college allowed students to pick and choose which services, if any, to utilize. Many times those decisions were made without the guidance of a professional staff member trained in college expectations.

While much of the actual registration and payment processes had been automated through the Internet, the steps leading up to these processes were scattered across the campuses. Therefore, students had to go from building to building to see different staff members who would carry out different functions in application processing, testing, advising, career counseling, financial aid processing, and course selection. Students lacked a single point of entry into the process, and there was no one person identified as their main contact. Students receiving assistance in one area and had questions regarding another, generally could not get an answer to a second question until they went to that specific area. For example, a student would stand in one line for advising, another line for testing, and then find out that he needed to be in another line to enroll or get financial aid assistance.

The enrollment service functions were scattered, inefficient, and ineffective. The processes were confusing and fragmented; and in between the steps, the college was likely to lose students who did not complete the processes. Additionally, students could have avoided steps in the process that were not required. For example, financial aid, while not required, is a critical step in helping all students, but especially the first-generation, low-income student. It was easy for students to avoid this office on their trek through the enrollment process and across campus.

It was clear from student surveys on enrollment services that the college was not meeting students' needs and expectations adequately. Staff members working in these areas were rated poor in helpfulness, guidance, and assistance. The surveys indicated that a significant number of students were not utilizing some of the services available to them from lack of knowledge and location issues.

The Solution

The enrollment management leaders believed that a one-stop shop was a viable solution. They submitted a grant to conduct further research and pilot three enrollment bars, one at each campus. They intended to do their homework, see the results, and construct a pilot which would determine next steps.

The first step in the process was to follow up on phone interviews that had been conducted previously by the enrollment management leaders. This step included taking a team of mid-level managers to best-practice locations for a firsthand look at operations. The final observation locations were selected, based on the closest fit to SJC and a variety of factors—including size, services provided, and impact experienced. The team came back in full agreement that an enrollment bar was a viable option.

The second step was to move forward with the design and construction phase. The enrollment bars varied, based on the preexisting space at each campus, but the overall concept provided for a bar or walk-up counter with multiple computer terminals (up to 12) for student use.



But the real essence of the bars is the enrollment specialists who work in the area. These personnel are trained to provide general information on all phases of the enrollment process, including campus activities, admissions, residency, payment, graduation, registration, financial aid, testing, advising/counseling, placement, career counseling, continuing education, and college information. They also assist with resolving problems and issues, telephone calls, and processing affidavits for undocumented students and student information changes.

The project required interdisciplinary teams to explore the policies and procedures required for an effective one-stop center. Additionally, it was critical that the enrollment specialists were trained on the enrollment module of Banner, the college's administrative tracking system, including tickler systems for follow up on prospective students that do not complete the enrollment process within two weeks.

The enrollment bars are designed to be a single point, but are entirely comprehensive. If the level of assistance needed at the enrollment bar exceeds the expertise of the specialist, the student is directed to designated staff in the specific service area through a referral slip which provides an introduction of the concern to the referral area. The ultimate goals for the enrollment bars were to minimize the number of stops that the prospective student must make in order to be enrollment-ready, enable the prospective student to develop a relationship with a liaison, and minimize the contacts that the prospective student has with back-office personnel who are focusing on paperwork versus serving students. The enrollment bar specialists are trained in a wide range of enrollment areas, but a major focus is to deliver impeccable customer service.

The Status

The enrollment bars were operational fall 2007. The volume of students served varied at each campus, based on size. The average at the largest campus was 425 per day, and the average at the smallest campus was 180 per day. Unfortunately, the volume was not tracked beyond August. Tracking systems for volume and type of services provided have been added for the spring semester. Additionally, other measurements will be monitored, including student perception of assistance based on current survey responses compared to responses prior to the implementation of the enrollment bars; the number of students completing applications but not enrolling for fall 2008 versus fall 2005 (baseline); and the percentage of students receiving financial aid by academic year.

The overall informal assessment from employees and students has generated positive comments, based on effectiveness and level of customer service. Addition-

ally, the normal wait in peak enrollment periods did not exceed 10 minutes. The largest impact was felt in the counseling, advising, and financial aid areas where the volume of students was reduced, and where enrollment specialists answer general questions for students who ultimately reached these offices requiring more complex information.

As anticipated, the different designs of the enrollment bars had an impact on the flow of operations. One design forced students to enter, move forward, and then exit back through the same exit. There was a small challenge of mixing traffic both entering and exiting. This location was constrained further because there was no large lobby or seating area for overflow. Interestingly, the college recently completed its master plan which includes major facility additions to provide full one-stop shop centers at two of the campuses. The cost for each addition is projected at \$8 million. The master plan process did not identify the enrollment bar at the third campus as an area of concern. In fact, the design and location of this enrollment bar provides a natural flow of traffic, including large open spaces for students to conduct their business, and should serve the college for several years.

While the completion of this project can be attributed to the vision and resourcefulness of the enrollment management leaders, the success of the enrollment bars is tied to the quality and level of service provided by the specialists. The key is to hire positive personalities who enjoy working in a high-traffic service industry. Once hired, they must be given the necessary tools and information to do their jobs. An extensive training module was developed for the initial kick-off. It is critical that the training be kept current and updated for curriculum changes and new initiatives. There are a plethora of items that impact a student's enrollment and ultimate success. These specialists play an integral role in that success.

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