



Ursinus College Hits Enrollment Goals With A Start-To-Finish Adviser

Ursinus College engaged with Whiteboard to improve its enrollment strategy and exceeded all goals in the process. Whiteboard was acquired by Huron in 2021, together providing a full suite of strategic solutions, including strategy, student search, pricing, recruitment and retention solutions, to enable institutions to meet their annual student enrollment targets.

Challenge

Founded in 1869, Ursinus College is a prestigious national liberal arts college located in Collegeville, Pennsylvania. The college offers consequential learning and keeps personalized and rigorous academics at the heart of its undergraduate education offerings.

“We really needed to have a partner manage us on every level. Whiteboard did that and did that effectively. It’s a big load off someone’s shoulders knowing that they’re working with us to hit our goals — not just for this cycle, but for two to three future cycles.”

SHANNON ZOTTOLA, VICE PRESIDENT AND DEAN OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT URSINUS COLLEGE

Results

- Enrolled sixth-largest class in history
- Increased applications, admits, and deposits
- **60%** of total deposits engaged with the student search campaign
- Estimated that for every **\$1** invested in search, **\$16** returned in first-year revenue

Leaders at Ursinus wanted to take a fresh approach to the student recruitment strategy. Shannon Zottola, the new vice president and dean of enrollment management and marketing at Ursinus College at the time, had a clear vision and goals for enrollment strategies. She wanted to set measurable and ambitious enrollment targets, increase communication around those targets, and build stronger relationships between the enrollment office and prospective students. She also wanted to take a more systematic approach to optimizing financial aid. Facing a slew of challenging goals for the year ahead, leaders recognized they needed an adviser to help identify messaging and targets of potential growth.

Fortunately, Zottola's appointment coincided with Ursinus' collaboration with Whiteboard, the college's strategic enrollment adviser at the time. Zottola was the first at Ursinus to work with Whiteboard on a complete enrollment cycle in the fall of 2018.

Solution

The Whiteboard team worked with Ursinus to launch a digital campaign targeting specific lists of students. Through the combined efforts of a customized search campaign and digital strategy, Whiteboard was able to identify and reach the right students, at which point Zottola was able to further engage with prospects.

"Our search program is designed to create genuine interest instead of quick, transactional interest," explains Jonathan Epstein, former vice president of enrollment strategies at Whiteboard and current senior director at Huron. "This was a good complement to Zottola's personalized, high-touch approach to every student."

Running parallel to the search campaign was a deep effort to create an effective, systematic approach to institutional aid. Whiteboard had presented to key stakeholders before Zottola arrived on campus and returned after she arrived.

Zottola mentions that Whiteboard's transparency and alignment with her approach were critical to their collaboration.

"You could see that stakeholders wanted different answers, but Rob [Bielby, former executive vice president of client success at Whiteboard and current managing director at Huron], stuck to reality," she recalls. "Having him explain, 'Here's why we're doing this. This model shows where things are likely to land if all things happen the way they're supposed to' — that's reassuring. It gave people a renewed sense of understanding and hope for what we can achieve."

Changing a strategy this drastically, Zottola notes, can be scary. The Whiteboard team helped Ursinus stay levelheaded, focused and on track. Zottola

shares that it was a real collaboration with the two teams counting on one another.

Results

Bielby, who deeply understood Ursinus, knew the hard work by both teams would set Ursinus up for future success.

"The model showed similar yields to previous years," says Bielby. But, knowing Zottola's approach to enrollment, he anticipated that the model would be beaten — and it was.

Despite the various changes taking place internally, Ursinus was able to hit all its major goals. Ursinus increased applicants, admits and deposits, as well as net tuition revenue. Three-fifths (60%) of the total deposits engaged with the student search campaign.

"It was as near perfect a cycle as you're going to get," says Zottola, mentioning they were up in applications, deposits and academic quality with a decreased discount rate. "I'm very proud of all those things, but what I'm most proud of is how our team came together in the midst of change and we got the job done. All the amazing metrics and statistics are a byproduct of that."

The metrics did provide a much-needed enrollment win to Ursinus, who enrolled its sixth-largest class in the school's history during the collaboration.

With added transparency and improved communication throughout the entire enrollment process, Zottola can show alumni, the board, parents, teachers and other stakeholders across campus where numbers stand at any point in the process. "It's a complete change in how people operate together."



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