



Exceeding Student Enrollment Goals

MERGER PROMPTS NEW PRICING AND DISCOUNT STRATEGY AT THOMAS JEFFERSON UNIVERSITY AND PHILADELPHIA UNIVERSITY

Before forming a comprehensive university in 2017, Thomas Jefferson University and Philadelphia University were known for their innovative transdisciplinary approaches to education. Jefferson set the highest standards in healthcare education through its graduate programs, while Philadelphia infused the liberal arts into its real-world learning approach to undergraduate and graduate programs. The institutions set out to transform higher education by delivering a high-impact, high-value education for students, focused on preparing them for yet-to-be-created professions.

“Whiteboard made an immediate impression. They are accessible, they understand our distinct message, and they aren’t a one-size-fits-all company.”

ERIN FINN, SENIOR ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Challenge

With the merging of the institutions came new opportunities across campus, including those for Erin Finn, senior associate provost for enrollment management. Taking advantage of those opportunities, however, would require ambition and perseverance. “Because Thomas Jefferson didn’t have a freshman class, there were a lot of leaders who had no experience with discounting or financial aid strategies,” explains Finn.

She was looking for an adviser who could help her create a pricing strategy for all academic offerings, develop and administer a discounting strategy, and educate the leadership. “We needed a partner who could do the nuts and bolts but also understood the broader strategy in recruiting a freshman class and could act as advocates for that strategy.”

Approach

Given Jefferson’s unique situation, Whiteboard knew meeting the university’s objectives would require a multiphase project beginning with intensive research and a comprehensive strategy before aiming for buy-in. “When we went in, Jefferson had more than 30 tuition models across two campuses in undergraduate and graduate programs,” says Rob Bielby of Whiteboard, describing just one piece of the challenge.

The collaboration fell into place quickly as the Whiteboard team embedded itself into Finn’s team, absorbing everything there was

to know about Jefferson and its enrollment goals. “Pretty immediately, we felt like we had an extension of our team,” Finn says. “Rob was another member of the senior leadership team. I can honestly say I felt like his only client.”

Whiteboard kicked off its work with Jefferson with three on-campus workshops to create transparency into the strategy and unpack the implications of tuition policy. Workgroups involved several leadership teams, including the provost, finance, and deans across academic departments. “The strategy touches every college. We also sent out follow-up surveys to ensure we had buy-in of the different strategies we were going to implement,” says Bielby. But there was zero pushback from any office. “A lot had to do with the upfront initial investment,” admits Finn. “Rob has a great teaching style.”

In smaller groups, Bielby presented a series of recommendations for tuition and discounting policies and practices along with relative trade-offs. “We probably had close to 30 scenarios we went through,” remembers Finn. “We kept asking Rob for iterations.”

“We developed a balanced approach to pricing that was both sound econometrically and also had the added benefit of presenting a clear and intuitive pricing model to prospective students,” Rob Bielby explains.

Results

The team’s work paid off. Jefferson hit all of its objectives, ranging from being more transparent about how the process works to setting universal tuition rates, improving academic profile, reducing the discount rate, and increasing enrollment.

Whiteboard also helped build and implement a brand-new awarding structure for all undergraduate students, including transfer students, and successfully implemented a pilot graduate awarding strategy for the College of Architecture and the Built Environment.

- **Increased enrollment and quality**
- **Decreased discount rate**
- **Improved academic composition**

Even more critical for the Jefferson team was the culture shift related to collaboration. “The COO said it was one of the best-run projects from the university the past year,” Finn shares. “I think it’s because they all knew what was going on, understood it, and could weigh in on decisions.”

She adds that Whiteboard was a major part of the collaborative effort. “I had very specific preferences about how we outline objectives or frame a particular part of the explanation,” she acknowledges. “The 50/50 relationship helped me as a project leader.”

Finn is thrilled that the Whiteboard team remains just as responsive and committed to Jefferson’s success as it was from day one. “You expect that year one of a partnership,” she explains. “But I am thrilled by the continued high level of involvement. We’re ecstatic about the momentum and excited to see it continue.”



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