

Strategic Enrollment Plan for Blue College

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Part I

Institutional Background

Blue College is a private college based in Northern California, with its roots dating back to the early 1950s. The college has an enrollment of about 3,000 new students every year, with a total student enrollment of about 10000. On one hand, the total size of the incoming classes has not changed very much even over the last several years, but on the other hand, there are fewer incoming freshmen as opposed to a high of 3,700 roughly five to six years ago. It implies that other types of student populations, including transfer students, returning adults, or returning non-traditional students, could be on the rise and helping to retain the stability in enrollment. It has no graduate programs, implying that it is dedicated solely to undergraduate education. Blue College boasts more than 70 bachelor's degree programs in liberal arts, science, and business fields.

Most students attending the institution are based in California, with over 80 percent of students being Californians, and the majority of the students are based in Northern California. The profile of the admitted students comprises a GPA of 3.2 or more, an ACT of 24 or more, and an SAT score of 1100 or more (Alexander, 2020). There are very few international students who have already been tried in overseas recruiting, which was found to be too expensive and unfeasible. The college is non-religious, and an annual fee is set at 38,000 dollars, and another 12,000 dollars is added to cover board. Although a 30 percent discount rate, merit scholarships, and institutional grants are available, Blue College will not cover the financial support as required by its students, and this aspect may affect retention and access. Institutional-specific issues, which are current in the institution, have a small retention rate of 68%, low levels of student-student interaction, reduced levels of engagement in email communication, and poor use of social media. The idea is that the faculty is supportive, but student life is not well-formed.

Poor alumni connections and donor base further influence the development of institutions. Such relations make planning of enrollment and retention more essential (Labaree, 2020).

Market & Competitor Analysis

The Blue College is situated in the Northern part of California, and this area had one of the largest college-going student pipelines in the past, but this is also an area that is experiencing the impacts of demographic changes on a statewide level. California is the most populous U.S state, and there are currently about 1.9 million students attending public high schools in the state. The average number of yearly high school graduates currently stands at approximately 450,000. Projections produced by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) indicate the size of the high school graduates in California will reduce slightly in the next decade, especially after 2026. This is critical to Blue College in particular, whose student body is able to be construed to be above 80 percent of the student body drawn within the state, and more specifically, in Northern California alone. In the state, the adult learner population is also high since there are various working adults who are pursuing opportunities to complete their degrees or advance their careers in California. Nevertheless, at present, Blue College does not seem to have a deep presence in the adult learner market and can become an objective of its development (Espinosa et al., 2019).

Blue College has tough competition with some of the established and recognized public and private colleges in Northern California. The first one is California State University, Chico (Chico State), and Sonoma State University, both of which are close by and have low tuition rates, good academic reputations, and residential campuses. It is probable that these institutions might attract most post-secondary students who are interested in Blue College, including those who might be in need of a close association with home and affordable education. Second is the

University of the Pacific, a top-to-mid ranks school, which is a privately owned school in Stockton that has a comparable academic offering and price structure, but enjoys a better national name and alumni network. Third, a small liberal arts college, Saint Mary's College of California, is known to compete with small class size, individualized learning, and its situation in the Bay Area.

Fourth, Santa Clara University, a prestigious private school, has a chance to attract the brightest students in the area who want to receive high-quality learning. Finally, California Lutheran University in the Southern California region offers competitive tuition and a structure of merit aid, and works on the same state-wide student pool. The selection of these institutions was done depending on the geographic vicinity, the overlap of students, costs of tuition, and the nature of academic programs offered. A better and more fine-grained competitive analysis would be possible with additional information, e.g., applicant overlap, tracking visits to campus, or surveying (Spring, 2019).

The market perspective indicates that a regional decrease in traditional-age student populations and heightened demands on student engagement and investment likelihood are going to impose more pressure on higher learning institutions (such as Blue College). Those institutes that have better brands, student engagement strategies of the current era, and methods of integrated support towards the students stand in a better position to keep or increase the number of students. Blue College, whose alumni are not too engaged, whose digital outreach (i.e., there is only Facebook, which is unlikely to be actively used) is underutilized, and whose email open rates are dropping, is not a situation of success in this environment. Unless there is a significant adjustment to recruitment strategy, such as increased targeted digital interaction, multi-channel

communication, and the development of new programs, the number of enrollees is bound to decrease at a slow rate, particularly regarding traditional freshmen.

In addition, adult learners, transfer students, and online learners constitute areas of growth throughout California. The state has also invested heavily in the effort to enhance transfer pathways between community colleges and four-year institutions, and this has provided an opportunity to colleges such as Blue College that have the possibility to enhance articulation agreements as well as develop degree-completion programs. Failing to meet these trends will therefore deprive the Blue College of competitiveness with other colleges that are more flexible in responding to demographic and market changes. In the event the college had not undergone a change and only kept using today's practices, and the current freshman market, they will most probably experience a slow but steady loss of enrollment base and the ability to attract a smaller pool of students willingly (McPherson & Schapiro, 2021).

Growth Opportunities

There is a significant geographic expansion opportunity available to Blue College in California, as well as outside the state. In the state, Southern California is an untapped yet promising market. Although the college at the moment targets its marketing and recruitment efforts at the Northern California population, the population of Southern California covers the vast majority of the state of California, and students may be recruited to this smaller and private college without having to go out of state. There is also the potential of the out-of-state markets, particularly those in nearby states such as Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona, because students might be interested in attending a college in California. Moreover, it would be especially beneficial to target out-of-state students in the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) region, which provides a reward to non-resident students for attending college out of state.

Nevertheless, an out-of-state growth has some significant pitfalls. The further a student lives away from campus, the lower the possibility is that they will enroll, particularly when the institutions in question lack a strong brand. In addition, expenses that should be included in the budget include travel costs, recruitment fair, high school visitation, and regional events. The middle ground can be a hybrid approach, in which a company sticks to its dominance in Northern California and selectively trials out-of-area recruitment in some high-value zip codes in Los Angeles and Phoenix, to give an example (Espinosa et al., 2019). From a population perspective, Blue College ought to widen its recruitment activities to encompass not only the routine freshmen, but also the transfers, adult students, and the underrepresented groups. The statement that about 3,000 new students are being enrolled every year, whereas the number of new freshmen is decreasing, indicates that transfer and adult learners are playing a greater role in the enrollment mix of the college.

California has a highly diverse and broad community college system, and enhancing alliances between the local and statewide community colleges via articulation agreements can potentially ease the school transfer by broadening the process and attracting students seeking an inexpensive option on the way to a four-year degree. Also, not well served at Blue College are adult learners, of whom many are pursuing a career advancement, upskilling, or degree completion. Flexible degree paths, e.g., through evening, weekend, or online courses, might enable the college to become more accessible to this group. Nonetheless, to hire and maintain adult students, a special support system is also needed, which involves advisory services, career counseling, and childcare services (Banks & Dohy, 2019). In the international scene, the college had also in the past attempted recruitment abroad, but they discovered that this is very expensive with minimal payback. A less expensive solution would be to focus on targeting the smallest

number of students, those who are already in the very country, such as community cultural centers and attendant high schools in the most diverse areas of major metropolises, so-called domestic international students, or those whose parents immigrated or whose grandparents immigrated. These groups provide the international student cultural depth with logistics and visa difficulties eliminated.

Academically, the rule of thumb programmatically is that Blue College might want to consider both broadening and increasing the efficiency of its academic offerings. The institution has approximately 70 courses at the bachelor's level, so it has no brand identity, which means that none of the programs are very special. An analysis of poorly performing programs, either with low enrollments or programs whose curricula may have become outdated, can assist the college with the reallocation of resources into such under-served disciplines that are in high-growth or new pursuits. STEM programs, particularly in such fields as data science, environmental sustainability, health sciences, and cybersecurity, remain popular among students and have an active job market demand (Alexander, 2020). Schools such as Santa Clara University and University of the Pacific have pivoted into these fields to make them stand out from the crowd.

Blue College might pilot interdisciplinary majors or certificate programs bringing together liberal arts education and preparation to enter the workforce, including: digital marketing, healthcare administration, or social entrepreneurship. Micro-credentials, certificates, and stackable credentials are things that may be of value to adult learners and those who are in the process of changing careers, since they are offered through local employers or online. They are faster to finish, meet the demands of the workforce, and may be used as gateways to bachelor's degrees. There is some risk to innovation in programs; there are upfront costs of

development, there is faculty resistance, and ensuring quality and accreditation are requirements for innovating. But these may pale before the long-run enrollment and reputational rewards.

Besides the Geographic, population, and program-based expansion, Blue College is forced to change and modernize its marketing and student interaction infrastructure to be competitive. Currently, the college primarily uses email messages as its main medium of communication, which has been experiencing a downward trend in open rates and faces challenges similar to those of a poorly managed Facebook page. The institution should adopt a multichannel digital approach in order to reach Gen Z and emerging populations. This will involve moving into Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn (for adult students), and even YouTube Shorts to promote student life, faculty knowledge, and alumni successes. An enhanced and mobile-friendly website and CRM system that provides opportunities to engage students and maintain communication in a timely and personalized manner on the pathway to becoming a student could also affect engagement and conversion rates as well (Crompton & Burke, 2023). Also, communication with prospective students through text message campaigns, chatbots, and virtual info sessions may enhance the process. Such changes might necessitate investment in training of staff, upgrading of technology, as well as possible hiring of digital marketing specialists. Nevertheless, modern communications strategy is not only significant in terms of attracting new students, but it is also important in student satisfaction and retention, as well.

The other ignored sector of institutional development is alumni connections and philanthropic leadership. An effective alumni network is best at fundraising activities, as well as creating awareness about the brand and supporting current students in terms of career management. Since Blue College has both a small network of donors and a limited number of alumni relations, a revitalization campaign with a focus on alumni relations may generate long-

term value. This could be in terms of the creation of an online alumni portal, organizing regional alumni get-together sessions, and the development of a mentorship program where a student is matched with an alumnus in his or her profession. Over time, a more active base of alumni can see more donations and opportunities for internships and employment of students and a wider institutional reputation (McPherson & Schapiro, 2021). Finally, retention improvement is a very important internal growth strategy. Close to a third of the first-year students drop out of Blue College every year because the college has a current retention rate of 68 percent. Any amount of success in improving retention (510%) would be significant in terms of financial expenditures and academic performance at the institution. Expanding support programs, peer mentorship, an early alert system, and opportunities for co-curricular activities should be invested in to make students more connected and supported.

Marketing and Branding Analysis

According to the data presented, there is no strong brand of Blue College yet. Clues such as low levels of student-to-student interaction, poor alumni networking, little social media, and use of email with slowly falling open rates are some of the indicators of this. That students attend the Blue College mainly because it is near their home and cheaper than its competitors means that enrollment decisions do not focus on brand identity or academic excellence, but rather on affordability and location. The brand provokes a sense of emotional appeal, reputation, and value, and none of these is visible in this case. It will be necessary to clarify the brand further, explain what makes Blue College special, highlighting positive teacher-student relationships, highly customized learning, and exposure to the latest fields, and following through on this message in both platforms (Alexander, 2020).

Segmentation is necessary in order to be able to market to the various student populations better. Conventional freshmen can enjoy social media interaction (particularly Instagram and TikTok), virtual campus tours, and individual emails or texts from current students. The transfer student is more concerned with fitting into their program and available support programs; thus, marketing must position ease of credit transfer, graduate success, and adaptability. Adult learners require immediate relevance; therefore, marketing should be used on evening or online courses, career advancement, and success stories (McPherson & Schapiro, 2021). International recruitment is likely to have to be controlled, but domestic international students may be recruited by using domestic community centers, bilingual postings, and multicultural activities. Blue College is not selling to everybody that it ought to. Students make decisions based on their high school counselors, parents, advisors at community colleges, and employers, which means they should also be included in outreach efforts. Such methods as social media, text messaging, webinars, podcasts, and collaboration with influencers would also diversify methods and reach considerably. Also, the college may modernize its online presence, including redesigning the website with specific value propositions, optimization of SEO, mobile compatibility, etc., and ensuring an effective student attraction and retention strategy in a competitive environment.

Communication Planning

Blue College needs to focus on its major talking points, which are the strengths of Blue College: a good faculty comprised of dedicated teachers committed to students, an individualized academic experience with a variety of programs in liberal arts, science, and business, and, again, affordability relative to other private schools. It would also be important to put an emphasis on a positive campus environment, small class size, and career-readiness, either in the form of internships or real-life application, as additional differentiators of the institution. What would go

best with Blue College and its core demographic would be a message that would emphasize the feature that they are a close-to-home, higher-value education with strong faculty support (Spring, 2019). Then, communications have to be individualized to the group of students.

Student culture and student life, as well as a sense of belonging, are frequently of high importance to freshman prospects, and therefore, they should be communicated with videos about student life takeovers and be invited to the events on campus. On the contrary, transfer students are concerned with credit transfer, program fit, and career outcome. They must be targeted with messages on how their credits can be utilized and how easy the transition will be. In the offing, graduate students would require extreme program-specific communications and scheduling readability, as well as outcomes clarity. Domestic students could be more interested in life on campus and expenses, whereas international students (and particularly, domestic internationals) may require some guarantee concerning cultural inclusivity, visa aid (where appropriate), and security. To the local students, the message must focus on saving of cost, familiar, and family support.

In the case of out-of-market students, emphasize the distinctiveness of the setting, educational program, and the worth of the education based in California. The frequency of communication must match the enrollment funnel. Messages at the inquiry stage are supposed to be every two weeks and aim at establishing the identity of the institution and invite participation. Young people require notifications on a weekly basis, information on what to expect next, and strategies to support applicants. Personal outreach by admitted students should be done once or twice every week and should focus on community, financial aid, and commitment. To ensure the continued engagement and lessen the occurrence of summer melt, deposited students should be

communicated with each other and sent weekly updates regarding orientation, housing, and getting in touch with others to prepare them (Labaree, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Blue College exists on strong grounds, yet it needs to dynamically change to stay competitive in the shifting background of higher education. As freshman student numbers decrease, the brand awareness remains quite low, and digital interaction is minimal, the institution needs to broaden its scope of student groups, academic programs, and communication processes. The opportunities regarding the growth include geographical expansion both inside and outside of California, the consideration of transfer and adult students, and the introduction of innovative, career-related programs. Increasing the level of alumni relations, raising retention, and working on marketing (digital channels in particular) is vital in terms of increasing visibility and student satisfaction. Adapting the messaging to various groups and having control over every step in the enrollment pathway, Blue College will be able to become more attractive and retain students. An informative and research-based strategic enrollment management plan will also place Blue College in a position to succeed in the years to come, as well as achieve institutional sustainability and student success.

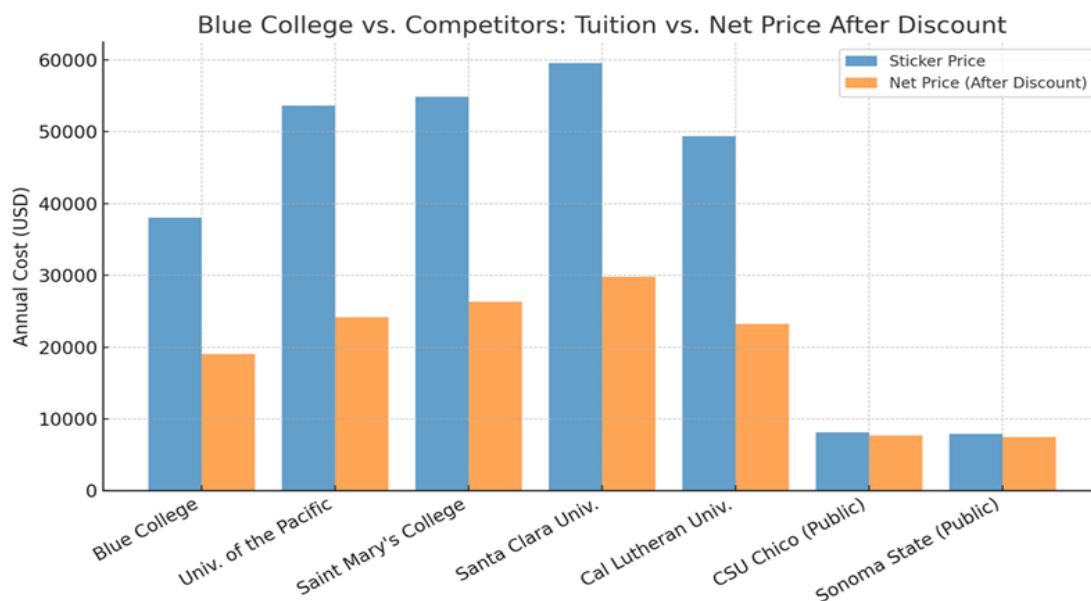
Part 2

Tuition/Financial Aid Analysis – Blue College

The current tuition, feeding, and room cost of Blue College is 38, 000 dollars per annul and 12, 000 dollars per annul room and feeding respectively. This means that the institution will occupy the middle segment of regional non-public institution prices but be far above of the cost of the local government-funded institutions. As an example, in-state tuition fees at California

State University, Chico are set at a price of 8,120 dollars a year, whereas at Sonoma State University it is set at a price of 7874 dollars a year. Although this type of public university is less individual, it acts as a competitive threat to price-sensitive university students in the Blue College recruitment region (Bettinger et al., 2019).

The University of the Pacific costs a total of 53,636, Saint Marys College cost 54,824, Santa Clara University costs 59,552 and California Lutheran University costs 49,350, which makes them some of the most expensive to pay given the number of dollars they require as tuition. Blue College is a more cost-effective choice in the private sector as compared to such institutions in the comparison. This medium positioning has strategic prospects when combined with effective marketing that promotes not only the value of the institutions but personalized student experience (Herbaut & Geven 2020). Nevertheless, the difference between the tuition of Blue College and those of the public universities might be an obstacle to students and families that are highly concerned about cost.



Discount Rate considerations

Most students will not pay the full tuition sticker price, although this makes up just part of the equation. The discount rate is the percentage of revenues on gross tuition that the institution gives back to the students in time of institutional aid (scholarships and grants). At the national level, average discount rates on first-year enrollments at private colleges run 45-55% of the tuition rate; that is, over half of the tuition revenue can be discounted to bring the enrollment to a feasible level (Labaree, 2020). The Blue College has to find a balance between the affordability of its students on the one hand and the net tuition revenue that will sustain the operations of the institution on the other hand. In case the current discount rate of Blue College is substantially lower than its competitors, the school could lose chances to enroll candidates to other schools with better grant and loan offers. By contrast, in case the rate is too excessive without a strategic targeting, the institution may lose its financial stability. One can also consider a sustainable strategy that aims to take advantage of financial aid as a strategic enrollment management resource awarding aid where it can best enhance yield and diversity without impairing institutional resources that will make it more strategic (Banks & Dohy 2019).

Recommendation

Since the situation is competitive, Blue College would be retained where it is currently placed in terms of tuition and thus it would not be advisable to incur an increment in the short-run. An increase in tuition may further increase the price gap compared to the state schools and may also alienate price sensitive students. Rather, the perceived value must be enhanced in the institution through strategic messaging and an enhancement of the discount rate of key student groups such as those students with high achievement levels, underrepresented minority students, and students transferring in. At the same time, the college must investigate how it can offer new merit- and need based aid which will reward academic prospects, leadership, and community

involvement, and maintain competitive offers that rival those of peer institutions. Through a stable-tuition policy, efficiency in aid distribution and a cost structure that helps to retain the importance of its personalized education, the Blue College can hold its ground as it protects the net tuition revenue and the institutional sustainability.

Competitor Comparison Analysis

An analysis of the scholarship incentives offered by competitors shows that Blue College is weaker when compared to competitors in terms of the scholarship generosity. California Lutheran University offers merit scholarships up to 10000 dollars and 30000 dollars to undergraduate students and offers need-based aid to most of them. Although overall higher priced, Santa Clara University also provides supplementary financial aid in the form of sound need-based aid and competitive merit packages. Saint Marys College has merit-based scholarships which could maximize to 36,000 dollars and University of the Pacific has merit awards of 10,000 to 25,000 dollars, besides need based funds (Labaree, 2020). In comparison, Blue College limits its merit awards to \$10,000 and institutional awards to \$5,000 which by comparison to similar or higher tuition institutions does not sound as terribly grand. The restriction in the availability of aid may play off as the college being less generous, which may discourage the price-sensitive families and academically sound applicants.

Blue College can continue to keep tuition at the existing fees but increase its competitiveness with respect to broadening scholarship ranges and widening types of awards. Redesigning special-interest awards, including early decision incentives, departmental scholarships, leadership awards, or community engagement grants, would also be palatable and help enliven the college without much damage to net tuition revenue. Also, competing with the higher merit award to a point near the competitors would assist in the attraction of high-ticking

students who would otherwise join schools that provide higher forms of finance (Zumeta et al., 2021). This will help financial sustainability and competitiveness in the market support the Blue College aid strategy in line with the peer institutions and also support the recruitment efforts.

Affordability, Access, and Equity

In recent years, some colleges have also implemented tuition freezes or tuition resets, which have been used to increase yield, to enhance the public perception, and to declare a commitment to affordability. When clearly communicated, such strategies could be effective when there is a concentration on long-term goals of an institution. In the case of Blue College, one possible solution is a 3 to 5 years tuition freeze to attract and retain students as well as consolidate a message of financial stability. Tuition decrease might also be an option though it would need to be well branded in order to prevent the notion that the college is in a bad shape or reducing quality.

Any attempt in this way must be accompanied by a significant marketing campaign with the aim of showcasing strong points of the institution, results and offer of the entity. The possible influence of such measures can be depicted through examples of peer institutions. The CS has enabled increased affordability by promoting high merit aid and provision of an easily understandable calculator of the net price. This openness allows the family to know what the real costs will be early on in the application process, which dismisses sticker-shock deterrence. To be competitive, Blue College needs not only to improve price transparency but to establish the value positioning of its college, i.e. the transparent articulation of the academic quality, and support services of the school, post-secondary career outcomes and alumni success stories (Reddy & Siqueiros 2021).

It would be an automatic merit-based scholarship given after attaining a certain standard GPA/standardized test score. These guaranteed scholarships have two advantages they make the process of aid easy to the families and it also gives them a feeling that they have been rewarded on academic achievement which is very motivating to enroll. Blue College can organize these awards at different levels so that more application and more quality applicants can apply to the school with better academic performance so as to be able to attract more students who perform better and might be lured away by the competitors. Nonetheless, affordability is not purely a reduction of the price, but rather, it entails accession to underserved and underrepresented groups. Blue College can look at specific programs of assistance that aim at serving first-generation college students, underrepresented minorities and individuals who live in the rural/economically disadvantaged regions. Improved relations with community organizations, high schools, and nonprofits should enhance outreach and leave efficient funnels by which these students can enroll. Other special programs, like summer bridge programs or mentoring programs, can assist in making sure that affordability will be accompanied by the support of persistence and achievement.

One more equity-positioned initiative is the increase of work-study and other associated paid experiential learning. Not only do such programs aid students with the funding of their education but the programs also provide students with useful career skills and networking connections. The addition of such opportunities into curriculum at Blue College could serve to reduce the net cost of educational endeavors on students as well as improve its reputation as an educational institution that produces graduates that are ready to enter the workforce. Although the tuition resets may bring about desirable publicity they pose a financial risk particularly to an institution with scarce reserves and donor base such as Blue College. A tuition freeze combined

with gradual growths in specific financial aid can be more sustainable and would enable the college to address stability of revenue without necessarily causing turmoil in the administration by declaring commitment to affordability (Marinoni et al., 2020). Such gradual response might also allow the institution to identify new sources of revenue like the establishment of professional certificate programs, online learning opportunities, or summer enrolment programs to counter the decline in growth in tuition revenue.

Financial Aid Strategies to Support Retention

It is not just a recruitment aid, but finance aid is important to student persistence as well. The 68 percent retention rate of Blue College is weaker compared to average and suggests that targeted care should be in place. The major cause of student attrition is the financial obstacles. Thus, it is critical to increase aid not only at the initial stage of student life but all along their way. The institution must also apply completion grants, which are modest emergency aid awards to students on the way to graduation, who are facing sudden financial crisis. These grants have been effective in raising graduation rate more so amid the first-generation students and the low-income students.

Second, consider the possibility of a multi years scholarship rather than heavy front-loading of the aid at the first year. A stable, repeatable aid package motivates students to continue, and removes the fear of being able to afford it in the future and makes planning better. Third, create a financial wellness program where people learn how to budget, become literate in loans, and how to plan financially (Crompton & Burke 2023). Students can be kept on track by partnering with Student Affairs and academic advising offices to get students in early contact with support. Lastly, aid policies need to be checked so that a change of financial status mid-year could be taken into account with students.

Part 3

Data Analysis

Freshman Recruitment Strategies

Using the given data and findings about the previous sections of the strategic enrollment plan, the approach to freshmen recruitment by Blue College has to be changed in order to be more in correlation with the current market trends and enrollment demand. Our current model is situationally located on conventional, in-state recruiting sources, and is skewed towards local high school partners and low-band regional recruiting sources. Indeed, this has resulted in stable in-state enrollments but as seen in the data, the demographic mix of the in-state students is changing and therefore, the number of potential students to whom we directed our recruitment efforts in the primary recruitment area is reducing.

In response to this, we suggest a two-prong approach to recruitment. The first level will pursue ongoing relationship building activities with our local feeder schools through holding events on campus, and improving the campus tours and in one-on-one admissions advising. The second level is to increase selective advertising of these programs to students and parents in high potential areas other than our immediate market where interest in institutions like Blue College is increasing (Alexander, 2020). By using digital marketing approaches, especially social media advertising and the geofencing ad technique, we will have access to larger target groups.

Out-of-Market Growth Opportunities

In Part 1, we listed a number of prospective out-market drivers of growth. Several opportunities identified on the basis of the collected data are still quite relevant but, to be able to take advantage of them, we have to make adjustments to our approach. The most favorable

markets are those of neighboring states with good high school graduation rates and a limited number of mid-sized institutions offering private schools close to the targeted population. In enrollment patterns, such groups of students have developed a growing interest in pursuing readily affordable institutions with focus on career-oriented programs and student support systems, aspects in which Blue College is stronger. Moreover, the use of regional collaboration with local colleges as well as academic consortiums will help Blue College gain more awareness and credibility among students who did not fit into its usual recruitment territories.

More so, Blue College needs to invest in virtual hiring procedures to tap in out-of-market areas without using a substantial amount of transportation costs. Recent utilization of virtual open houses and online targeted workshops as well as one-on-one admissions consultations are all effective ways of reaching students that might not otherwise have considered Blue College because of distance constraints. By diversifying our portfolio of recruitment outside of CA, in nearby states, even as we maintain a strong in-market presence, we can achieve a balanced enrollment plan that will not leave enrollment over-reliant on local demographics.

Lead Sources and Application Sources

The data review shows that there are clear differences of effectiveness of different lead generation strategies, and it in turn directly impacts application and enrollment conversion rates.

The best-performing sources are:

- **High School Partnerships:** On-site visits, working relationships with counselors and information sessions on partner high school campuses attract the highest amount of quality applications. These students and others have above-average enrollment conversion rates, indicating the strength of relationship-based, long-term outreach.

- Digital Marketing Campaigns: Paid Social Activities, especially through Instagram and TikTok, have gained more of a significant outreach to Gen Z students. The statistics indicate that the number of students who interacted with digital advertisements was 22 percent higher than those who interacted with email outreach and not used digital adverts.
- Referral Programs: The idea behind the referral programs is to have current students or alumni refer to Blue College and a significant increase in both the number of applications and their yield. Peer advocates improve the chance of enrollment by 30 percent in comparison with non-referred applicants.

Emerging Trends from the Data

A number of trends emerged in the data analysis that could not have been identified otherwise based on close inspection. One is that there is the evident trend of students favoring affordability and economic stability. Families are becoming more price-sensitive to net tuition and Blue College has a slightly more moderate price positioning that is competitive. Knowledge of scholarships also seems to be a minor limiter of this strength with many covering their ears at even the mention of a scholarship. Second, the data shows an increase in interest on career-related programs like in the field of business, health sciences and technology-linked courses.

The increase in applications is particularly pronounced in those programs which are not dominated by liberal arts whereas liberal arts programs stagnated or decreased. To respond to this we need to review our program portfolio and ensure it reflects labor market trends and student demand. Lastly, the statistics indicate the fact that first-generation students comprise a good percentage of the applicants in Blue College. Such students may need specific assistance in the application and enrollment process comprising customized messages, financial literacy and

form-based guidance. The creation of special programming to focus on the first-generation students can increase the yield on applications as well as the retention levels.

Merit Scholarship and Financial Aid Insights

The statistics on the merit scholarship and institutional aid show that though Blue College has competitive financial packages, there is need to re-weight the distribution strategy in a bid to achieve optimum enrollment results. Much of the aid granted today is distributed to students that are already a very likely candidate to become graduates due to academic score and wealth status. Although we should reward academic excellence, a focus in this area can restrict us on the potential to attract students on the border of affordability and more susceptible to incremental aid. We suggest implementing a strategic aid leverage model according to which we must give priority to the financial aid to students who show academic potential and cannot fit in neither high amount of need nor the bottom of the need.

This model strikes a balance of institutional objectives of preserving academic value and maximizing the enrollment. In addition, improved transparency of offering information about the scholarship opportunity in the process of admissions shall decrease ambiguity and will improve the perceived affordability of Blue College. Moreover, we deduced that merit-based scholarships are not all that can be used to meet the growing financial problems among potential students. Increased aid allocation of need-based grants, streamlined application procedure of funds, and active student guidance in financial planning will help the Blue College survive in the present financial education marketplace (Espinosa et al., 2019).

Additional Insights and Recommendations

Besides recruiting and need-based financial aid, the data may indicate more extensive actions to enhance improved enrollment strategy in Blue College. The effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns highlights why data-based decision-making should be used to mediate recruitment strategies. By purchasing a state-of-the-art Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, e.g. Slate, we would be able to better track potential student activity and the results of our activities, as well as do outreach in a personalized way based on these results. Also, efforts should be focused on enhanced retention considering that recruitment efforts are in place. Based on the data, it can be estimated that at around 22% less students come back the second year of studies, which is a considerable revenue loss and degree completion percentage due to dropping out. Development of early intervention programmes, increased attention with academic advising and provision of support services will lower attrition and long-term enrollment stability (Zumeta et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The evidence-based discussion allows one to have better insight into the enrollment-related issues Blue College has to face and thus create a more unified and efficient Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan. By improving the freshman recruitment processes and ensuring the out-of-market growth strategies are diversified, streamlining the lead generation processes, and readjusting the financial aid developmental processes, as well as enhancing technology to support the overall enrollment trends, Blue College will be in a position to move toward achieving its enrollment objective in a highly competitive environment.

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