Six "Must Do" Strategies to Win in the Graduate and Online Market

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Expectations Have Changed

Technology (and AI) has changed today’s students, and they expect higher ed to keep up.

Generations Have Changed

MILLENNIAL GRAD STUDENTS

65% of grad students are Millennials (and Gen Z exceeds Gen X in numbers)

MILLENNIAL GIVING

3/4 give to charity

5% give to their alma mater

Sources: RNL 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report; RNL Surveys; CASE VSE 2023
Strategy 1. You must offer fully online programs (and classroom programs should offer online courses).

How to Win

Every year, thousands more students opt to enroll in all or partially online study while fewer choose classroom study. Trends did not “snap back” to classroom after the pandemic. Grad students are opting for fully online, while undergrads are most frequently opting for partially online. You need to develop high quality online options, fast.
Strategy 2: Your online programs must be in high demand topics.

How to Win

You cannot “niche” yourself into enrollment health. Among 1,000+ subjects, the 20 largest produce 40% of degrees, leaving 900+ subjects to via for remaining market share. You need to determine which of your existing programs is under-performing before you add new.

Note: More than 170 subjects produced fewer than 10 graduates nationwide
Source: RNL analysis of IPEDS completions data
Strategy 2: Your online programs must be in high demand topics.

How to Win

You cannot “niche” yourself into enrollment health. Management Science and Management Science and Quantitative Methods program classifications both represent Business Analytics programs. They have cumulatively added more than 25,000 master’s degrees in five years. 
Strategy 3: Your program – online or otherwise – must be accelerated and blend structure and independence.

How to Win

Few undergrads OR grad students enroll in semester-driven programs. With the abundance of accelerated offerings, you will lose if your programs are not offered in shorter terms. Structure preferences are split and therefore blend independent work with structured deadlines, due dates, etc.

Source: 2022 Online Student Recruitment Report, RNL
Strategy 4: Flexibility/convenience are a better argument for your program than are either prestige or quality.

How to Win

Only 26 percent enroll in the least expensive program, so if you are less affordable focus on flexibility, content match, but do not over-rely on the “prestige” factor unless you truly ARE the prestige provider in your region or program area.

Source: 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report, RNL
**Strategy 5:** Search engines must be at the center of marketing efforts.

**How to Win**

A multi-channel integrated marketing campaign must start with SEO – paid and organic. 90+ percent of students use search engines as either their first or second step. SEO must be regularly updated in order to keep ahead of the algorithms. Good SEO is achieved by relevant/useful content on your program pages.

Source: 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report, RNL
Strategy 6: Respond and admit quickly – or risk losing the student and/or creating a bad “first impression.”

How to Win

Students expect timely response like any other service they access. This means responding within minutes (or hours) to meet their expectations AND ensure they have a positive attitude about your program. They also expect timely acceptance. Both factors significantly improve your likelihood of enrolling the student.

Source: 2022 Online Student Recruitment Report, RNL. Data represent an average of expected response time by email, text, and phone.
Why does this all matter?

44% say a slow response indicates they are not a priority to the institution.

45% say a slow response indicates a lack of adequate support services.

62% will likely, very likely, or definitely enroll in first program to respond to their inquiry.

64% Say personal responses to inquiry is important/very important to their consideration of a program.

85% will likely, very likely, or definitely enroll in the first program to admit them.
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