

 GRAD AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

Using Process Mapping and the “Communication Marathon” to Increase Faculty Involvement in Graduate Student Recruitment Efforts

By Heidi Puckett

Graduate admissions officers face challenges recruiting quality graduate students, including decreased staff and increased competition from other institutions. In an attempt to increase recruitment efforts, this study used process mapping and the “communication marathon” to engage graduate faculty in recruitment and outreach. Following implementation, the graduate school experienced an increase in faculty willing to participate in recruitment efforts and a 15 percent increase in new student enrollment.

While most marketing for higher education—particularly in admissions—is focused on undergraduate admissions, there is a growing concern related to enrollment in graduate-level programs at universities. As a result of increased competition for graduate students, graduate programs must remain aware of current enrollment trends, as well as admissions marketing opportunities, to ensure that the competition does not result in a decrease in the number of registered students (Burrell 2008; Hope 2016; Lim, Jee, and De Run 2018; Lomer, Papatsiba, and, Naidoo 2018). Competition has increased so dramatically that faculty members may worry about compromising the quality of students in their programs in an effort to maintain enrollment and ensure the continuity of their

program (Hope 2016). Each program has identified the characteristics and requirements of qualified students who can be successful in the program as well as contribute to the university’s efforts related to research, teaching, and service. Graduate-level programs and graduate students provide a variety of benefits to the institution, and it is worthwhile to evaluate and create a strategic marketing plan for graduate programs. Students in graduate programs conduct valuable research, teach undergraduate courses and labs, and contribute to the overall collegiality of an institution (Hanover Research 2015).

When responding to a survey conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Board, deans of graduate

programs were asked to identify pressing issues faced by their institution. The majority identified recruitment, admissions, and enrollment management as top concerns (Hanover Research 2015). The more specific concerns identified by the respondents included: “managing declining or growing enrollments, competition for prospective graduate students, challenges in attracting a diverse applicant pool, challenges in recruiting international students, and recruiting quality graduate students” (Hanover Research 2015, 7).

Some institutions have limited state funding and other sources of revenue, which prevents them from reaching out to prospective graduate students with incentives such as assistantships, stipends, and scholarships. Research has previously indicated that these are effective strategies for graduate recruitment (Hanover Research 2015). Institutions with less access to these types of incentives must be creative in determining other ways to reach out to and engage prospective students.

After a review of the enrollment trend and current outreach efforts, the graduate school at East Carolina University (ECU) decided to create and implement a plan that would take advantage of a currently, underutilized resource: graduate program directors. The intervention that was implemented was widely accepted by the faculty and showcased the extensive amount of work completed by the graduate school related to recruitment for their programs. Ultimately, taking advantage of the opportunities for program directors to build relationships with prospective students played a role in achieving an increase in new graduate students.

Background

East Carolina University (ECU) is a large public research institution located in the eastern part of North Carolina. The university typically enrolls approximately 28,000 students—22,000 undergraduate students and 6,000 graduate and professional students. ECU is located in Greenville, North Carolina, in Pitt County. Greenville is located in the north central coastal plain region of Eastern North Carolina, approximately 85 miles east of Raleigh, the state capital. Located approximately 87 miles west of the Atlantic Ocean and approximately 265

miles south of Washington, D.C., Greenville and Pitt County serve as the commercial, cultural, educational, and medical hubs of Eastern North Carolina. Greenville has grown into a small metropolitan city of more than 90,000, while Pitt County has a total population of 156,000. ECU is North Carolina’s third largest and fastest growing university, and each year, the university generates more than \$2 billion for the state’s economy.

The graduate school at ECU enrolls more than 5,000 students and offers more than 70 master’s degree programs, nineteen doctoral and first professional degree programs, and more than 80 graduate certificates. The graduate school leads development and administration of the university’s graduate programs by: providing central support for marketing, recruiting, and graduate admissions; facilitating the development of new and existing programs; and establishing and implementing effective academic policies. The graduate school is also responsible for retaining and graduating high-quality graduate students, distributing resources strategically, assuring graduate program quality, encouraging and supporting graduate student scholarship and creative activity, and implementing efficient and effective best practices in support of graduate education. In support of this mission, the graduate school administers the annual assistantship budget of \$6.5 million and a tuition scholarship budget of \$3.5 million.

Graduate students are vital to the research and teaching at ECU. The university is positioning itself as a leading higher education institution in the eastern region of North Carolina in order to provide a vast portfolio of graduate programs that are consistent with the job market within the region and beyond. Globalization and technological innovation have brought about long-term changes within the economy. These changes alter the higher education demands, which impact recruitment strategies, outreach, and marketing. The graduate school at ECU seeks to provide academic programs that will allow students to be successful and competitive as well as make a difference in the region and beyond.

In examining the structure of the enrollment management offices and the resulting recruitment and outreach efforts at ECU, one can recognize the importance

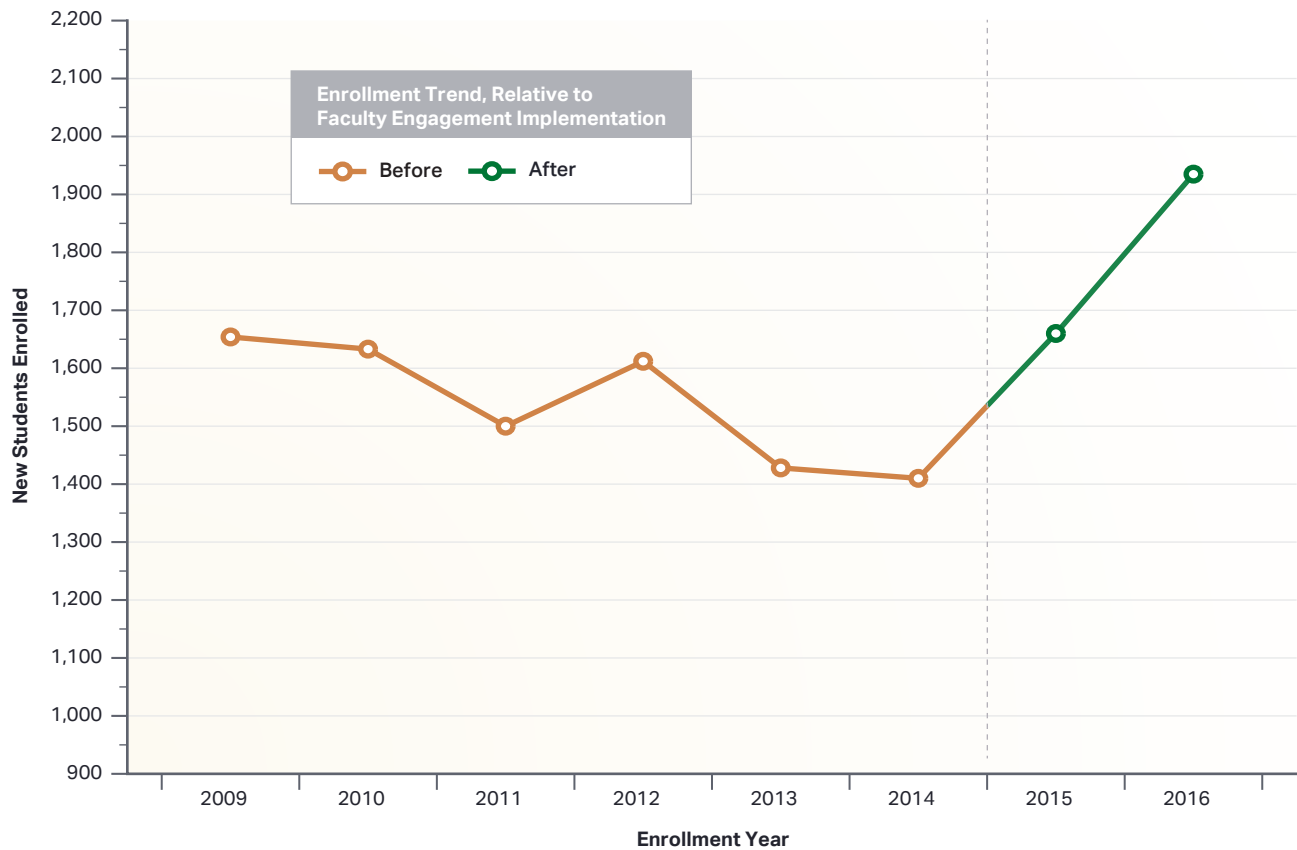


FIGURE 1 ► New Student Enrollment Trend

of faculty involvement in graduate program outreach. All graduate admissions functions, other than the recommendations for admissions, are executed within the graduate school, an academic unit. The undergraduate enrollment management office operates as an administrative unit reporting directly to the provost. Graduate recruitment efforts and staff are funded through the graduate school budget, whereas the undergraduate office and staff receive their funding from the provost's budget. The graduate school serves as the overarching academic authority for graduate programs at ECU with an operating budget that is stretched in many directions and from which enrollment management only receives a small allocation. It is apparent that graduate students are an important part of the overall population of the institution, but ECU had been experiencing a continual decline annually in the number of graduate students enrolled at the institution (*see* Figure 1).

Similar to the situation at ECU, the typical structure regarding enrollment management at most institutions shows a thriving undergraduate program that may assist with any gaps in graduate student enrollment (Woodhouse 2006). ECU, following the hiring of the researcher to serve as the new director of graduate admissions, was able to reverse the prior trend that reflected a consistent decline in the number of graduate students. As a result of a strategic marketing and communication plan put into place, along with additional outreach initiatives, the number of graduate students increased. In order to accomplish this increase, a focus was placed on outreach, engagement, and faculty involvement in the marketing process, along with graduate enrollment professionals “work[ing] proactively to build and maintain relationships across administrative silos... assigning responsibilities based on cost efficiencies, customer service, and expertise” (Williams 2008, 57).

In a time when undergraduate admissions and enrollment become more difficult and competitive, the number of graduate students at institutions becomes increasingly significant and may offset a decline in the overall registration numbers. The guiding research construct for this project focused on the implementation of a communication plan that would engage and empower graduate faculty to participate in recruitment for their programs.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the project was to provide faculty with the tools, as well as the confidence, to conduct outreach for their specific graduate program in an effort to increase the sustainability of each program. Ultimately, the project aimed to increase the number of registered graduate students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were created to guide the study using the improvement science framework to focus on the desired results of the implementation, while recognizing that any observed change is an improvement.

- Can faculty involvement in recruitment efforts increase graduate enrollment?
- What type of communication opportunities can result in an increase in the involvement of graduate faculty in the recruitment process?

Review of Literature

In order to put the graduate enrollment trends at ECU into context, it is important to examine the national trends. Graduate education has seen a 2.1 percent increase in first-time graduate enrollment for fall 2018 and a 1.5 percent increase in overall graduate enrollment (Okahana and Zhou 2019). CGS President Suzanne Ortega stated, “The increases in application and first-time enrollment rates for Fall 2018 after last year’s slowdown is encouraging news for graduate education” (Hazelrigg 2019). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, total enrollment increased by 307,000 between 2017 and 2018, with 3.81 million graduate students in 2017 and 4.08 million

in 2018. Institutions responding to the CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees reported receiving more than 1.8 million applications for fall 2018.

The CGS report also found that the largest one-year change in first-time enrollment between fall 2017 and fall 2018 was in mathematics and computer science (4.3 percent), while engineering programs experienced a decrease of 8.3 percent. First-time enrollment in arts and humanities remained flat for fall 2018 (Okahana and Zhou 2019).

Applications received in fall 2018 again showed that the largest number of applicants were to master’s degrees or graduate-level certificates. Between fall 2017 and fall 2018, first-time graduate student enrollment increased by 2.9 percent in doctoral-level programs and by 3.7 percent at the master’s level. According to the institutions responding to the survey, 59.7 percent of first-time graduate students were women. The report also showed that women earned nearly two-thirds of the graduate certificates, 58.3 percent of the master’s degrees, and 53 percent of the doctoral degrees (Okahana and Zhou 2019).

The CGS report indicated that 24 percent of first-time graduate students were from racially/ethnically underrepresented populations. There were increases in first-time graduate enrollment among Latinx students (6.8 percent) and American Indian/Alaska Native students (8.3 percent). The positive trend for Latinx students has remained consistent for the last three years (Okahana and Zhou 2019).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects employers will add a significant number of jobs requiring a graduate degree or higher between 2018 and 2028. Specifically, the Bureau projects a 13.7 percent increase in positions requiring a master’s degree and a 9.0 percent increase in job opportunities for those with doctoral degrees (Okahana and Zhou 2019). Additional individuals with graduate-level education will be needed to fill this demand.

Higher education institutions continue to face issues related to insufficient budgets, which can have a direct effect on the recruitment of new graduate students. In an effort to increase interest and outreach for graduate

programs, as well as focus on resource availability, institutions have been asking faculty to take part in the student recruitment process. At many institutions, faculty from academic programs are asked to take on the recruitment and admissions process for their program or department in addition to their typical teaching and research requirements (Woodhouse 2006). In some instances, department heads may allow these individuals to lighten their teaching load when taking on the recruitment and admissions responsibilities (Wiener and Peterson 2019). However, this opportunity might not exist in smaller institutions or departments, and, therefore, faculty may become responsible for the admissions process in addition to their everyday duties.

In a study conducted by Woodhouse (2006), the researcher sought to determine if graduate faculty were involved in recruitment activities and, if so, whether their involvement was a result of an administrative directive or their own desire to be involved. Woodhouse (2006) found that a majority of the 138 respondents indicated that recruitment is part of their job responsibilities, but they are not required to participate.

Recruitment plays an important and vital role in the sustainability of academic programs and departments at universities. With the increased level of competition, it can be challenging to recruit the “perfect” students for each program. Each department must determine the specific profile, characteristics, and experiences of the students they are seeking (Guilbault 2016; Hope 2020). Once this profile has been identified, faculty can begin searching for applicants who will bring particular skills and experiences to the program.

In a typical undergraduate setting, the strategic enrollment management (SEM) office and staff serve to address issues of recruitment and retention and provide students with more efficient and effective service related to their admission experience. This also allows faculty to focus on academics (Vander Schee 2010). This model is not always replicated in the field of graduate enrollment management (GEM). Many institutions function with decentralized graduate-level programs, which can result in different levels of outreach from each program. Individuals within each program may

have different experiences and beliefs about the importance of recruitment to program sustainability. Because students are being recruited to specific programs, it tends to be more efficient and effective for faculty in each program to be involved in the recruitment and admissions process. This type of relationship marketing can be successful (Vander Schee 2010), but it is also important that a central GEM representative is available to work with program faculty to ensure that they are aware of all recruitment opportunities, as well as follow all regulations related to recruitment and enrollment. Faculty with less experience in marketing and communications can benefit from working with the GEM professional to construct a recruitment plan specifically for the individual program and take advantage of building relationships with prospective students (Hope 2020).

Traditionally, regarding SEM and GEM and faculty involvement, there has been a discrepancy in the approach to recruit and enroll new students. In SEM, recruitment and enrollment of new students typically is conducted by SEM professionals in an “admissions office.” Faculty involvement in GEM can counter the decentralized nature of graduate education. Graduate applicants are expecting and seeking individualized interactions with faculty in their specific program of interest throughout the admissions process (Hope 2020). The creation of these mentor relationships can lead the applicant to confirm their selection of the specific program at the institution. Regardless of SEM or GEM, in the field of enrollment management, students at all levels can be thought of as “customers,” and faculty should focus on providing the customers with the information they need to make decisions about their programs (Guilbault 2016). This type of customer-focused service can help connect the needs of the customer and the strengths of the programs.

Of higher education employees surveyed in a 2010 study, Guilbault determined that faculty had the lowest customer mindset and the most difficulty thinking of students as customers. Previous research shows that faculty attitudes matter and play a significant role in student performance. Studies such as this serve as additional confirmation of the necessity of faculty in-

volvement in the recruitment and admissions process, especially in graduate-level programs (Guilbault 2016).

In a study describing the role of the faculty member, Ortega (2003) indicated that faculty can make a significant impression on prospective students. Faculty play an important role in student recruitment, advising, and networking opportunities and lead the admissions efforts for the program. These high-impact practices have shown positive results with current students, including higher grade point averages and improved retention (Kuh 2008). Kuh's high-impact practices are typically applicable in situations regarding current students; however, similar practices could strengthen the recruitment process and increase relationships between faculty and prospective students. Astin (1984) finds that frequent interaction with faculty relates most significantly with student satisfaction over any other type of involvement. Although Astin's research—like Kuh's—focuses on current and typical undergraduate students, there are some aspects of their theories that can be applicable to both recruitment and graduate students. Increased faculty involvement in this process can also result in satisfaction with other aspects of the educational experience, including peer relationships, course offerings, research opportunities, and university administrators (Astin 1984; Kuh 2008). When prospective students are provided extensive interaction with faculty, even prior to being admitted, they may be more likely to feel connected with the university and the program (Hope 2020).

Method

Most educational research designs (Creswell and Creswell 2018) focus on serving one of the following purposes: creating a new theory, developing new tools and materials, or conducting an evaluation of a current program or policy. Unlike the previously identified purposes, improvement research or improvement science is focused on making social systems work better. Improvement research considers and evaluates what is already in place, while looking for areas where improvement is necessary or desired. The following three questions typically guide improvement science work:

1) What are we trying to accomplish? 2) How will we know that a change is an improvement? 3) What change can we make that will result in improvement? (Lewis 2015). This guiding framework was utilized to identify the research questions for this study. This method uses a focused study to produce new knowledge about how to create positive change or implement an intervention resulting in positive outcomes. Variation in implementation and setting are important sources of information that can be used to make additional changes (Lewis 2015). Essentially, improvement science focuses on improving the success or the possibility of success of the current plan or policy.

When taking into account the enrollment issues faced at the graduate school at ECU, it was apparent that positive change was necessary to improve the sustainability of the graduate programs. An initial review of outreach efforts was conducted. The new director recognized that a strategic communication and marketing plan would be required to increase visibility, interest, and, ultimately, enrolled students. The director also indicated that it would be important for the faculty directors of each program to be intimately involved in the outreach and recruitment process for their individual program. At some institutions, there is a specific marketing and communications team to focus on enrollment marketing for all levels at the university; however, at ECU there was no central marketing team specific to the graduate school, and the graduate programs functioned in a decentralized manner. It was important to ensure prospective students receive desired information about each program, but with more than 200 graduate programs and certificates, the amount of time needed to accomplish this goal with minimal admissions staff in the graduate school was not available.

Recognizing that engaging faculty in the outreach and marketing process was a vital part of the recruitment efforts, administration encouraged the director to ask each faculty program director to create their own marketing plan specific to their program. With little to no marketing and recruiting experience for most faculty members, many were frustrated about where to begin. Seeing this, the director put together an extensive mar-

keting plan that could be utilized and altered to fit each individual program and ensure that the nuances and unique points of distinction of each program were communicated. The marketing plan also provided a visual template, or process map, to increase faculty involvement and indicated that minimal specific information would be required from each faculty director to ensure that each program was appropriately represented.

The initial communication review found that there were little to no communication or marketing efforts being conducted about graduate programs for several reasons: lack of plan/direction, need for innovation, faculty fears related to outreach, and a very small staff to be able to execute a plan. An evaluation found that there were no formal, centralized communication efforts about the graduate programs. If individual communications were being sent at all, they were from a faculty member to a specific prospective student. There was no comprehensive plan in place to provide outreach to all prospective students; specifically, students were not provided information on the specific program or the university overall. There was also no effort, centralized or otherwise, to collect contact information and maintain a list of prospects. The graduate school was using an application that was internally developed but did not have access to a customer relationship management (CRM) tool for more structured outreach to applicants and prospective students.

During the course of the communication and marketing review, it was determined that there were common, procedural emails that needed to be sent to individuals in all stages of the admissions funnel providing information on their application and admissions status. These communications also provide applicants with specific information about their program of interest and details about the university. The director created a plan with these emails and other communications and then reached out to the program directors to seek their involvement.

The director created a visual document that included the specific communication efforts to help make the plan more palatable and user-friendly for program directors seeking an increase in participation at the

program-level (*see* Figure 2, on page 40). This type of value stream mapping, or process mapping, is used frequently in industry and visually displays all actions related to completing a process (Alexander and Fadden 2017; Wenchu Shou, Jun Wang, Peng Wu, Xiangyu Wang and Heap-Yih Chong 2017). Providing this type of visual information indicates a focus on the big picture and improving the whole, rather than a focus on individual processes (Wenchu Shou, *et al.* 2017). Utilizing the idea of the entire application and admissions cycle as a marathon, the communication plan was now described as a “communication marathon,” and program directors were provided a “marathon map.”

The communication marathon was introduced to faculty during a half-day recruitment workshop. In an effort to increase buy-in and faculty engagement, program directors, department chairs, and the assistant and associate deans of each college were asked to attend. The purpose of the workshop was to review ECU enrollment trends compared to national trends, coordinate centralized marketing efforts with the academic programs, develop individualized program enrollment goals, learn about communication strategies, and develop best practices. Faculty were presented with information on digital advertising and marketing, including providing updates on what the graduate school was doing in regard to digital marketing to promote each program. They were also advised on how to coordinate their individual program efforts with centralized efforts to combine resources.

During the workshop, the faculty were also asked to work with others in their departments and colleges to begin thinking about achievable enrollment goals using best practices, assistantship offers, case studies, and trend data collected for each program. The final session of the workshop focused specifically on communication strategies and best practices that could realistically be implemented in each program. These strategies and best practices were described and further guided with the use of the marathon map, which was then presented to the workshop attendees.

The marathon map displayed the emails and other communications being sent by the graduate admissions



FIGURE 2 ► Communication Marathon Map

Adaptation of ECU's Graduation Admissions "Communication Marathon" documents provided to faculty and graduate program directors

office throughout the admissions funnel. Although sufficient information is sent from the graduate school to cover questions and concerns of prospects, applicants, and admitted students related to the admissions and application process, it is important that the communication with these individuals include contact from the specific

program of interest. Considering that a multi-channel marketing plan would also provide effective communication, faculty directors were advised that their communications did not have to be electronic in nature.

In an effort to describe the importance of continued outreach, the graduate school communications were

The marathon map displays the emails that are already in place by the Graduate School. Although sufficient information is sent from the Graduate School to cover questions and concerns of prospects, applicants, and admitted students, it is vitally important that this communication plan include contact from the individual programs. (Please note that all communication does not have to be electronic. You may also add other types of communication in the plan, including phone, direct mail.)

Please review the communication that is already being sent from the Graduate School and consider where additional communication from the program can be added. The list below provides some suggestions for content.

Use the map to determine where program-specific communication should be placed within the current plan. Once you have identified emails to add, write the content and send it to the Graduate School to be added. The Graduate School is happy to help with any questions or concerns regarding additional strategic



Supplemental Communication

- ▶ Points of distinction
- ▶ Welcome from program... advising / registration / course selection / contact info
- ▶ Faculty profiles
- ▶ Current student profile
- ▶ Alumni profiles
- ▶ Career information—employability, where alumni work, internship options
- ▶ Attend a program / department / college event
- ▶ Info on how program / department / college participates on campus...involvement
- ▶ Speakers
- ▶ Visit campus
- ▶ Application incomplete / deadline reminder from program
- ▶ Email from program director / department chair / college dean
- ▶ Interesting research
- ▶ Opportunities for students to conduct research / teach, etc.
- ▶ Information about graduates around time of graduation
- ▶ Student organizations related to program
- ▶ Information about curriculum

Graduate admissions is a marathon, not a sprint!

FIGURE 3 ▶ Instructions and Supplemental Communication

Adaptation of ECU's Graduation Admissions "Communication Marathon" documents provided to faculty and graduate program directors

associated with a "mile marker" on the marathon map. Faculty program directors were encouraged to provide additional communications, specific to their program, that would be considered "water stops" between the mile markers. Faculty were provided with suggested supplemental communication representing information spe-

cific to their programs that could be added to the plan. The content for these supplemental communications included, but was not limited to, faculty profiles, student profiles, career and alumni information, invitations to departmental events, and research being conducted by faculty in the department (*see* Figure 3). Utilizing the

visual of the marathon map was a successful way to describe the importance of ongoing communication.

An outside firm developed a framework of recruiting recommendations for graduate programs in an effort to prevent decline in student interest and matriculation. One of the recommendations was to “develop strategies for the full recruitment funnel” (Hanover Research 2015). Many times a student might be admitted to a program and then receive no additional communication until classes begin; the program directors and other faculty may assume that the student is knowledgeable and has all the information needed. Additionally, faculty and program directors might assume that an admitted student has made a decision about which institution to attend when this might not be the case.

In an effort to combat the “communication gap” occurring between admissions and matriculation, faculty using the marathon map are able to see the importance of ongoing outreach. The finish line represents matriculation, and each communication along the marathon route serves to increase prospective student engagement. In an actual marathon, runners are said to “hit the wall” at approximately mile 20 (Paul 2019). Mindset and decisions made at this point can determine the last six miles, as well as the outcome of the race and success of the runner. In the communication marathon, admitted students could also be described as “hitting the wall” around mile marker 20. This is most likely where summer melt occurs. Summer melt refers to the point in time prior to matriculation where admitted students choose not to enroll and disengage with the institution (Curran, Feinberg, Kelley, Li, and Zhou 2016). Incoming students, like runners, need that extra support and outreach to become more comfortable with their decision and finish strong. At mile 20 in the communication marathon, the graduate school communication efforts focus on being admitted and on logistical items, including registration. Although the information from the graduate school is important and relevant, students could benefit also from additional outreach and the opportunity to build relationships with faculty members. This is where relationship marketing and a focus on each individual admitted student could make the difference in their decision to attend.

Faculty were also encouraged to reflect on the “points of distinction” that described specific details of the individual program that makes it unique or stand out among others in the field. Many institutions have begun using similar marketing-oriented strategies to differentiate themselves from the competition (Khanna, Jacob, and, Yadav 2014; Pucciarelli and Kaplan 2016).

Workshop attendees were given time to review the communications included on the map, along with the recommendations and requests for additional participation. Once faculty had considered the “water stop” emails and the points of distinction, they were asked to submit information to the director in the admissions office for insertion into the communication plan embedded within the graduate admissions’ CRM system. These specific program communications then became part of the attempt to provide prospective students with information related to their program of interest and ensure that applicants and admitted students received appropriate continual communication between the time of admission and matriculation.

Subsequent to the completion of the workshop and introduction of the communication plan, attendees were asked to complete a brief survey regarding their initial opinions on the implementation of the new strategies.

Findings

Following implementation of this improvement effort within a more robust communication and outreach plan, graduate programs experienced a 15 percent increase overall in new student enrollment. Faculty involvement played an integral role in the success of overall outreach and communication with applicants. The effort to increase the involvement of faculty in recruitment for their respective programs also resulted in increased positive interactions and assistance between the graduate school and the faculty program directors. The graduate director also deliberately focused on the importance of customer service, both within the admissions office and among faculty, and required positive and helpful interactions between the staff and applicants. The increase in enrollment provided an answer to the first research question; the efforts to increase

faculty involvement successfully increased graduate enrollment. In order to determine the type of communication opportunities to which faculty were more likely to respond and provide information on research question two, the improvement plan included the use of the communication marathon and faculty workshop to introduce the best practices associated with the map. These efforts unexpectedly resulted in expanded involvement between the admissions office and the individual programs and faculty, as well as stronger relationships between these individuals and departments. Faculty indicated that they recognized and appreciated the efforts of the new admissions director as well as the support from administrators in the graduate school.

In regards to the overall communication strategy, the dean of the graduate school recognized that after receiving the communication marathon and best practices, the efforts of “associate deans, graduate program directors and support staff at the unit level and college level helped make a difference by communicating frequently with prospects.” And, as stated by the provost, “marketing (in-state, out-of-state, and international) will be the key to a healthy future for graduate programs at ECU.”

Reactions to the marathon map structure, and being directly involved in recruitment efforts, were collected via comments within the survey following the workshop and through emails to the admissions director. According to information from the survey, 35 individuals attended the initial workshop and provided feedback. One participant commented that the marathon map was an “excellent description of process with marathon analogy.” Another faculty member indicated that the visualization regarding strategic communication continued to be helpful when meeting with other faculty in the department: “I use the marathon map at every faculty meeting to reiterate the importance of outreach and our efforts.”

Several comments were related to the overall information that is provided to applicants and admitted students: “This was a great way to help us know exactly what the students get and when and how we can supplement with a personal touch as well!!! Very helpful” and “Appreciate knowing that each response can be tailor-made in an automatic email.”

Another faculty member and associate dean described the value of the assistance provided by the admissions office regarding recruitment and outreach: “Faculty have been so appreciative of the consistent willingness to go all out to help them. All the different things you’ve done are often mentioned at our HCAS Graduate Council meetings.” Another faculty member described his experience working with the admissions office, following the implementation of the new communication plan, as “proactive, extremely helpful and strongly enthusiastic.”

After reviewing the feedback from faculty regarding the initial workshop, a secondary cycle was added to the project. This cycle involved individual follow-up with faculty to maintain the level of involvement after the workshop. Secondary efforts took place through email or face-to-face meetings. The graduate school continued to offer information and training to program directors who reached out for assistance in strengthening their recruitment efforts. Additionally, since faculty indicated that the presentation had been helpful, the admissions director sought to provide this information to other program directors and faculty members who may not have attended the workshop.

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this effort was to introduce recruitment best practices related to communication, outreach, and strategic marketing in graduate-level programs to faculty and increase the involvement of faculty in the recruitment process. One could speculate that the efforts of the director and the expanded faculty involvement in the recruitment and enrollment process impacted the enrollment increase and strengthened relationships (Hope 2016).

The admissions director recognized the importance of presenting the information in a way that would lessen any intimidation related to communication plans and allow faculty to feel confident in their outreach efforts. A process map was the key to providing a large quantity of information regarding the process and ensuring that the majority of participants would remain engaged (Alexander and Fadden 2017). Recognizing that

the majority of the faculty program directors did not have experience with strategic marketing and communications, it was important to ensure the information provided regarding participation was straightforward and relatable to the individual program. This was accomplished through workshops and meetings with faculty, visuals that provided faculty with the basic details of the communication plan, and opportunities for faculty to contribute.

The graduate school also was seeking a positive impact on enrollment. With more than 200 graduate programs and certificates, it was not feasible for the director of admissions, with limited staffing, to adequately provide the information on each program to prospective students, applicants, and admitted students. There was also a need for faculty to be more involved in building relationships with students prior to their arrival on campus to keep them engaged with the institution.

In order to reinforce communication and outreach information, the researcher recommends continuing to host workshops similar to the one described, perhaps of a smaller size and with programs from one college at a time. It would be helpful to continue offering training opportunities and speaking about the efforts and results at faculty directors' meetings. The researcher

also recommends meeting with each new program director to ensure that they are aware of the recruitment opportunities, including what is already in place and what information can be added to the plan. Additional study could also focus on the matriculation rates for programs with more faculty engagement versus programs where faculty may not be as involved in outreach. A study expanding on Woodhouse's (2006) research on faculty involvement could provide updated information on the topic of graduate program directors.

Overall, when considering the comments received following the introduction of the communication plan, it is apparent that the faculty who attended felt the information presented was helpful. In fact, each response about the workshop showed appreciation for the efforts of the graduate school. Implementing the communication and outreach plan proved to play a role in increasing the number of incoming graduate students, and it is likely that the efforts focused on encouraging faculty to become involved and engaged in recruitment also contributed to the positive outcome. Graduate enrollment management continues to play an important role in determining the success of the overall institution, and it is through efforts like the ones described here that allow faculty members to remain engaged in the process.

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