LEADING STRATEGIES

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Enrollment and Retention at One Small Private College, and the Innovative Strategies Used to Address These Challenges

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Enrollment and retention in higher education can be challenging under normal circumstances, but combined with a global pandemic and changes in the overall prospective student landscape, institutions will need to look at strategies to help navigate these uncertain times. This article outlines how a college navigated these challenges within the context of Kotter's organizational change management theory and successfully maintained their enrollment. Through the lens of qualitative research, leaders at the institution were interviewed to garner data on how this collective effort transpired. Five key themes emerged from the study. First, collaboration was a key component for enrollment and retention initiatives, guiding the strategic planning to enhance sustainable outcomes. Second, technological advancements in enrollment and retention platforms secured seamless transitions during the crisis. Third, external support helped to reduce financial barriers to enrollment. Fourth, investments in enrollment and retention support systems was a critical element of maintaining headcounts. Fifth, community partnerships and the creation of new academic programs and support positions provided the needed backbone for enrollment and retention growth.

The impact of COVID-19 on college enrollment and retention is just beginning to be studied. Friga (2020) surveyed 285 presidents and chancellors who were members of the Presidents' Trust of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in March 2020. The majority of those surveyed, 84 percent, anticipated a decrease in enrollment for both new and returning students. This decline in enrollment coincided with an expectation of revenue decreases. More than half of the participants expected decreases in revenue between 10 and 20 percent, and 18 percent anticipated revenue losses of greater than 20 percent (Friga 2020). This article will outline how one institution was engaged in improving student success prior to the pandemic yet held strong to their goals and emerged in a light more positive than many other institutions.

Enrollment and retention in higher education are a perennial topic of interest for colleges and universities. Many institutions are reliant upon net tuition revenue, derived from the enrollment and retention of their students. Enrollment projections lead to the creation of annual budgets, determining what gets funded and cut. (Hossler and Bontrager 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic forced colleges and universities to reevaluate their projections for future enrollment and budgets. According to The National Student Clearinghouse (2020), fall 2020 enrollment dropped about 2.5 percent overall from 2019. It is estimated that approximately 400,000 fewer students attended college in 2020. This staggering number has had institutions questioning whether or not students would return to "normal" levels following the pandemic (St. Amour 2020). It has also led to concerns about which students are being most negatively impacted and are not participating in higher education.

Aristovnik *et.al.*, (2020) researched the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, using a sampling of 30,383 students from 62 countries. Three methods of data were used: descriptive, regression, and quantitative response. This study revealed that transitioning to online learning platforms was only successful with the support of both the faculty and the institution. However, the study did indicate that there were deficiencies among computer skills, higher coursework demands, social contact, habits/routines, and the online environment (Aristovnik, *et al.* 2020).

When looking at the challenges of higher education, Darbishire *et.al.* (2020) showed how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the overall enrollment management process, recruitment practices, retention, graduation, and licensure for pharmacy students in graduate programs. The exploration of their management processes and the limitations caused by the pandemic helped them allocate additional resources to support enrollment, recruitment, and retention efforts through use of social media incorporating alumni and current students (Darbishire, *et al.* 2020).

Enrollment management is a collaboration of processes that incorporate mission and institutional goals (Hossler and Bontrager 2015, 5). Through enrollment management, conceptual models and structural shifts over time are based on institutional needs. As Dolence (1990) stated, "A successful enrollment management program fundamentally changes the way institutions perceive their clientele, confront challenges, exploit opportunities, and manage their resources" (1). Enrollment management is the driving force for overall recruitment and retention of students in higher educational institutions (HEIs). The pandemic and current economic crises have significantly strained the way in which HEIs have viewed their current enrollment and retention.

Organizational change management is "managing change related to the project being implemented. It involves identifying the groups and people impacted by the project and in what ways they will need to change" (Smith, *et al.* 2020, 32). COVID-19 has changed the way in which HEIs have had to implement organizational change management processes. Institutions that are facing enrollment and retention crises are often the ones to undergo the most comprehensive change (Vander Schee 2007).

Kotter (1995) stated, "Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership" (60). Strong leadership, collaboration, and a willingness of employees to work toward organizational change related to enrollment management is critical to success of the any HEI (Smith, *et al.* 2020).

Kotter's (1996) change management model is a widely recognized management model. Kotter's model outlines eight steps to leading change in organizations: (a) establishing a sense of urgency; (b) forming a powerful guiding coalition; (c) creating a vision; (d) communicating the vision; (e) empowering others to act on the vision; (f) planning for and creating short-term wins; (g) consolidating improvements and producing still more change; and (h) institutionalizing new approaches.

This study was conducted at a small private non-profit undergraduate institution of higher education located in Northeast Pennsylvania, with seven satellite locations, serving 2,000 students, of which approximately 85 percent were commuters. The qualitative research data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven participants and included senior leadership, mid-level management, and front-line staff selected through purposive sampling.

Due to strategic-based decision-making for enrollment and retention, senior leadership and/or their cabinet-level leaders create the institutional goals and programming. Senior leadership and their cabinet at the institution in this study were comprised of the president, provost and chief academic officer, chief operating officer, vice president for government affairs and special projects, vice president of human resources, vice president for finance and administration, and other unit- or division-level vice presidents in such areas as enrollment management, student affairs, academic affairs, and fiscal affairs. These individuals were an important part of data collection in supporting the following questions: (1) How is this specific HEI increasing enrollment and retention rates to secure a sustainable future? (2) What are the innovative strategies that the HEI is employing to increase enrollment and retention during times of crisis?

Mid-level managers were academic or nonacademic support personnel. They were directors of various departments such as enrollment management, student financial services, registrar, student success, advising, career services, and student wellness. These individuals were not part of the president's cabinet but were important in providing support to enrollment and retention of students during times of crisis.

Front-line staff worked closely with students. Examples of front-line staff include admissions counselors or enrollment specialists, financial aid counselors, academic advisors, and student success personnel.

Accessing Data: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2020) was used for the quantitative data needed for this case study. The data collection processes were grounded in publicly-verifiable data through IPEDS. IPEDS and NCES are data sources that help to shape analytics for enrollment and retention within in HEIs (Hossler, *et al.* 2015). This data was an important part of this qualitative study due to determining verification of enrollment veracity over a period of time, which may show innovational impacts on student success and enrollment. This data helped to understand the important connection between innovation and enrollment during a time of crisis.

Data Analysis Plan

Limitations

A limitation of this study was an inequitable representation of participants at all levels of administration, management, faculty, and staff. The unavailability of data from all employees allows for the assumption of gaps in valid data that would be beneficial to the research. However, it was not possible to interview such a significant number of employees, and incorporating purposeful sampling was designed to address this deficiency.

The following questions guided this research study:

- What are the enrollment and retention challenges during a time of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the strategies that one small private college used to address enrollment and retention challenges?
- What are the innovative strategies that all HEIs can use to increase enrollment and retention?

TABLE 1 ➤ Participants Demographics: Gender, Institutional Role, and Years in Position

ID[1]	Gender	Institutional Role	Years in Position
1	Female	Senior Leadership	15–20
2	Female	Senior Leadership	15–20
3	Male	Senior Leadership	5–10
4	Male	Senior Leadership	20–25
5	Female	Senior Leadership	5–10
6	Male	Senior Leadership	5–10
7	Male	Mid-Level Management	5–10
8	Female	Mid-Level Management	5–10
9	Male	Front-Line Staff	10–15
10	Female	Front-Line Staff	1–5
11	Female	Front-Line Staff	1–5

[1] Participant identification number

TABLE 2 ➤ Themes and Categories

Theme	Category
Enrollment Strategies	▸ Reason for Steady Enrollment ▸ Collaboration ▸ Use of Technology
Retention Strategies	▸ Students Staying and Not Transferring ▸ Use of Technology ▸ Technologies ↳ Learning Management System ✓ Canvas ↳ Customer Relationship Management (CRM): ✓ Spectrum EMP ✓ Starfish ✓ Laptop Loaner Programs ▸ Scholarships
Institutional Strategies	▸ Created New Positions ▸ Technologies to Support ▸ Community Partnerships ↳ Corporate Partnerships ↳ Donations ↳ Scholarships ▸ Tuition Reimbursement

Qualitative Findings

Overall findings suggested that this HEI was well ahead of its strategic enrollment and retention goals at the time the pandemic occurred. Its strategies provided some areas with a seamless transition to deliver online and remote learning environments to students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 gives a brief description of the study participants from this case study.

This study showed how this HEI's perspectives on enrollment, retention, and institutional strategies were the emerging themes for this study. Throughout this study, the word innovation was used to define the use of technology and other organizational changes that yielded enrollment and retention success through the pandemic. Table 2 gives a brief description of the themes and categories that emerged from this case study.

Within each theme, categories were created to show the similarities that emerged from the participants who were interviewed.

- Enrollment Strategies: interviewees spoke about why enrollment was steady, and how technology was instrumental to maintaining outcomes.
- Retention Strategies: participants discussed how students were not transferring, and how technology, specifically Starfish and Canvas, were used and the reasons associated with this success.
- Institutional Strategies: contributors spoke about the creation of new positions, the investment in technology, and the Industry/Corporation
- Partnership/sponsorship/donations and scholarships that were impactful to aid in student financial burdens.

Theme 1: Enrollment Strategies

Enrollment management is a collaboration of processes that incorporate mission and institutional goals (Hossler and Bontrager 2015). Through enrollment management conceptual models, structural shifts over time are based on institutional needs. As Dolence (1990) stated, "A successful enrollment management program fundamentally changes the way institutions perceive their clientele, confront challenges, exploit opportunities, and manage their resources" (1). It was clear from the launch of the interviews that each of the six participants of senior leadership—two participants from mid-level management and three front-line staff—viewed enrollment as a collaboration of departments, management, and strategic goals. Although literature describes enrollment management in some cases as not needing to report to one specific area, Bontrager (2004) establishes that "where formal lines do not exist, strong communication links must be established" (15). Each participant had a different perspective to the enrollment strategies that were related to pre-COVID and current outcomes. Table 3 displays what the participants in this study expressed about enrollment strategies.

TABLE 3 ➤ Theme: Enrollment Strategies

Category	ID[1]	Response
Reason for Steady Enrollment	1	"Record enrollment pre-COVID, and during COVID due to returning students."
	2	"Significant investment in advertising and a shift towards digital advertising that we saw historic growth in inquiries and applications through the two significant years of COVID."
	4	"COVID certainly hurt and helped in a couple of ways. Some students didn't want to go away and stayed home, so we offered affordable service for them while they decided where they wanted to be eventually."
	9	"Because we are local and are community focused, we were able to continue our growth and not just sit still while the world shut down."
Technology	2	"Invested money into our online division, and we've saw significant growth in online."
	10	"We've instituted some different tools to kind of help us track students and help guide them through the enrollment process here at the college, we utilized Spectrum EMP as our CRM, and just recently switched to JRM Salesforce."

[1] Participant identification number

As shown in Table 3, it can be depicted that this institution had built the foundation for growth prior to the pandemic. Once the pandemic hit, it relied heavily on the returning student population to help keep its doors open. According to participant five of senior leadership, "this institution is 84 percent tuition-dependent, like most colleges and university tuition dependency is not uncommon." Due to being largely tuition-dependent, this HEI invested money into its digital marketing strategy. This helped to keep the pipeline of inquiries and applications growing. As a member of senior leadership (2) states, "significant investment in advertising and a shift towards digital advertisement, we saw historic growth in inquiries and applications through the two significant years of COVID."

During the interviews, it became apparent that responsibility of enrollment and retention goals were not limited to any one department or person. For example, Figure 1 describes the enrollment and retention responsibility of this HEI. The findings are based on the eleven participants' estimation of the frequency of usage of the departments responsible for enrollment and retention during the interview process. Figure 1 shows the findings as they relate to who was responsible for enrollment and retention.

As noted in Figure 1, although 29 percent of those interviewed viewed admissions and enrollment management as bearing the largest responsibility, it is also evident that many departments share the responsibility for enrollment and retention. A member of the front-line staff (9) stated:

> *The great thing about our institution is that it's a collaborative process. So not just one department is involved in the decision making, there may be a department that brings something up, but then it's brought to the table and all of the key players, whether it's financial aid, student success, admissions, or advising, everybody is involved. This is because the students overall experience has been touched by all of these departments. So, it's like a network of support that these students have.*

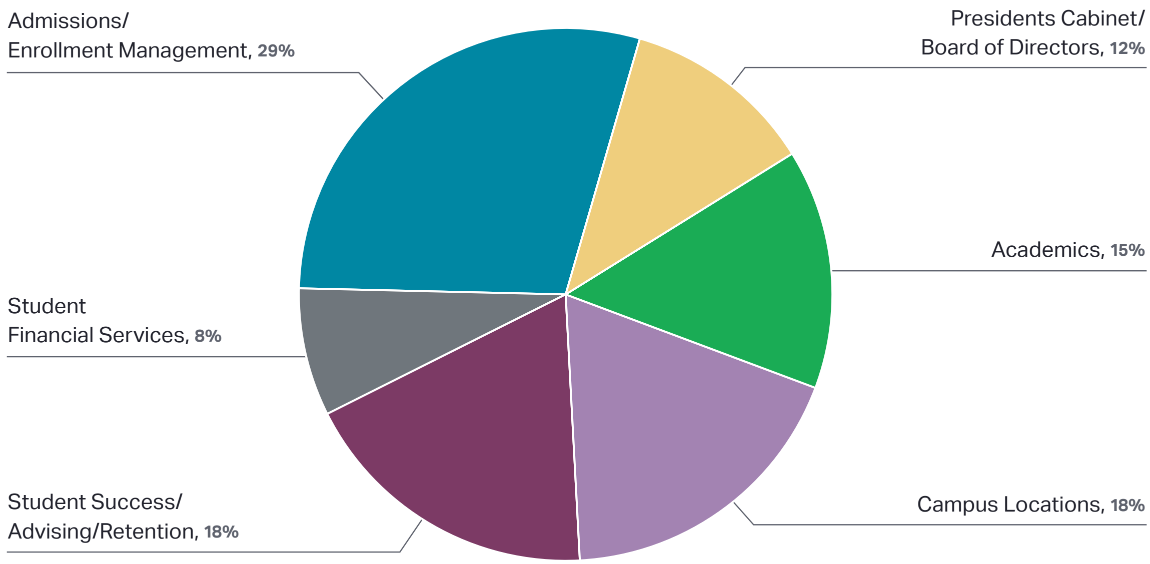

FIGURE 1 ➤ Enrollment Responsibility

Every HEI faced challenges with enrollment and retention during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, collaboration of all departments helped one HEI maintain its enrollment performance. A member of a senior leadership team, stated that the foundations were laid with the revision of the overall strategic plan being completed just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 2: Retention Strategies

Challenges in enrollment and retention during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies that were utilized are described in Table 3 (on page 47). The viewpoints of the participants of this study as shown in Table 4 (on page 49) were comprised of reasons for steady enrollment and use of technology to meet enrollment outcomes.

As described in Table 4, it can be depicted that this institution was willing to put money, time, and effort into supporting retention needs. Prior to the pandemic the institution's strategic plan included expanding not only academic programs but also degrees. It also dedicated funds on software to help track students during their enrollment.

Creation of New Online Division

The timing of the creation of the eLearning/online division and the learning management software (LMS) Canvas coincided with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. A LMS is an application or web-based technology used to plan, implement, assess a specific learning process, and provides a forum to offer both synchronous and asynchronous courses. Canvas ensured a continuous shift from traditional face-to-face learning to an online learning platform, which provided seamless education. Canvas provided the conduit between student and faculty. Students were able to continue their academics seamlessly, and faculty were able to provide guidance and instruction.

Investing in Retention

Investments in retention during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies that were utilized, are described in Table 4. The viewpoints of the participants of this study are categorized under retention strategies. These investments are comprised of reasons for increases in retention and technology used to meet enrollment outcomes.

TABLE 4 ➤ Theme: Retention Strategies

Category	ID[1]	Response
Reason for Increase in Retention	1	"We invested almost $3 million in the student success department, knowing that retention was a huge part of our enrollment plan. I think it's now almost $5,000,000, if we think about the CRM system Starfish."
	2	"The first year of COVID, we were able to maintain growth, but it was driven primarily through retention."
	3	"I see an increase in students wanting a combination of online and on-ground classes. Students aren't asking for fully on-ground schedules, but they are not asking for fully online schedules either. So, the implementation of "Hybrid" has become instrumental to our growth."
	4	"Scholarships and other enrollment incentives to reach cohort size and building up our retention base is how we can help those students to stay."
Technology	4	"Due to having to move quickly during the COVID shut down, we were able to create a laptop loaner program, to help support our students who did not have the resources they needed."
	5	"From a retention stand point our growth is due to Starfish. Starfish has helped us grow our returning population, by providing the data needed to reach our students who are at risk earlier in their semester."

[1] Participant identification number

Theme 3: Institutional Strategies

Organizational Changes

Through this study, it became inherently clear that the pandemic brought out change within the leadership at this HEI. Prior to the worldwide shutdown of the COVID-19 pandemic, senior leadership and their board of directors were in the process of creating new positions in order to grow the institution toward its goal of 2,500 students by the year 2025. In July 2020, the president retired, and a new leader was hired during the COVID-19 shutdown. Committees were formed to provide technological, financial, academic, and mental health support. Participants expressed their views of institutional strategies, as shown in Table 5 (on page 50), that were followed to address the COVID-19 crisis and were successful in addressing enrollment and retention. The participants' views on institutional strategies helped to support enrollment and retention.

As described in Table 5, this HEI created new positions to support enrollment during the pandemic to help with outreach during the shutdown. A senior leader (5) stated:

> *During COVID we had no idea what enrollment was going to look like. And so, we add additional bodies to our enrollment team, to try to increase our outreach. So, during COVID, the response was not what we thought it would be, we fared better than most or a lot of other institutions in terms of our enrollment. During COVID, staffing was increased, staffing has been part of the initiative to keep our enrollment up.*

As described in this interview, the senior leader knew she would need all the support they could muster by creating more enrollment outreach staff. These individuals were integral to the growth of enrollment during this time. Another area in which institutional strategies played an important role was reorganizing departments, centers, and program offerings.

A mid-level manager (7) stated: "These committees help to guide senior leadership, midlevel management, and frontline staff to keep students engaged while trying to keep everything business as usual."

One of the key additions to the online academic division was the creation of an associate dean of eLearning and information literacy. This position was created to provide seamless learning from a traditional in-classroom education, to an in-depth online learning model and platform. From the inception of the position, it was to be mutually beneficial to all students, faculty, and staff, by providing the necessary structure and formatting to the online learning outcomes and faculty support. This was beneficial to faculty, and ultimately students, who were comfortable with the platform during the COVID-19 shutdown.

Another addition that occurred shortly before the pandemic was the creation of the position of a dean of student success and retention. This position was created to bridge the gap between new and returning students. According to a mid-level manager (8),

> *Enrollment and retention ideas and concepts are of great importance to providing the right information to help the student continue through that enrollment process and actually attend classes that help them to be successful. The creation of a first-year student success program, helped to establish success plans for all students, in and outside of specialty programs. This program and the purchase of Starfish was huge in helping to track students throughout their enrollment and identifying students who were struggling without having the students come directly to us.*

TABLE 5 ➤ Theme: Institutional Strategies

Category	ID[1]	Response
Creation of New Positions/ Center/ Programing	5	"During COVID we had no idea what enrollment was going to look like. And so, we add additional bodies to our enrollment team, to try to increase our outreach. So, during COVID, the response was not what we thought it would be, we fared better than most of a lot of other institutions in terms of our enrollment. During COVID, staffing was increased, staffing has been part of the initiative to keep our enrollment up.
	2	"Significant growth and you can probably also say it was historic growth for variety of reasons. It wasn't just changing our Admissions team or at the Center we launched for the first time in the college's history, awarding bachelor level degrees. We opened new satellite centers, we relocated satellite centers and invested more money into the launch of our online division and we've seen significant growth in online. We've added additional specialty programs."
	9	"There is one partnership in the area that has, definitely helped us at our location. It's the McDonald's partnership. It's a scholarship through the Mueller Family Foundation. It provides 100 percent tuition assistance for students who work at least 16 hours a week, maintain a 2.5 GPA, and are enrolled in at least two classes."
	10	"We've developed some scholarship opportunities for students working at certain organizations. Where you know they are offering some scholarship money, we match that money."

[1] Participant identification number

Through all the technological investments that the college made, Figure 2 (on page 51) shows the representation of the eleven participants' perspectives on the increase to enrollment based on the CRM and LMS software.

As noted in Figure 2 (on page 51), investments in institutional technology helped this institution meet its enrollment and retention goals through the pandemic. Not only has technology been beneficial to this HEI, but so has their community.

Community Partnership

According to the participants of this study, community partnerships through corporate scholarships, donations, and tuition remission helped to provide not only current students, but employees of these businesses, the opportunity to return to college and receive their education. "Programs like these could not be possible if it were not for the community that support our mission and vision as a college," according to senior leader (3).

This partnership and scholarship has provided individuals who did not think they would be able to afford college the opportunity to attend and earn a degree.

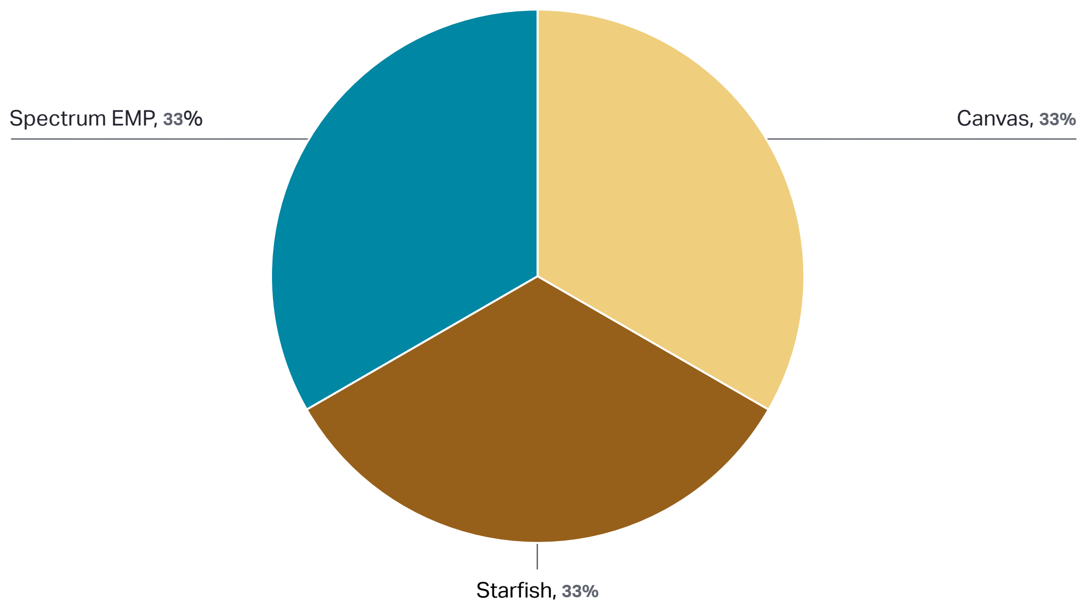

FIGURE 2 ➤ Participants' Responses to Technological Investments

All of these strategies and implementations as described by the participants of this study were an integral part of their HEI's survival during the pandemic. Their foresight and strategic planning helped to lay the ground work for their success. This can also be shown in the data that was pulled for this HEI's overall enrollment through the use of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) from 2008 through 2020 (2020).

IPEDS Findings

Figure 3 (on page 52) demonstrates the effect of the implementation of the CRM software to this HEI's overall enrollment and retention growth.

The data in Figure 3 show the beginning of historical growth for the college, from its inception of the CRM software that was rolled out in 2017. This growth continued through the pandemic. Subsequently, this HEI has transitioned to Salesforce, a CRM that integrates seamlessly with their current data retrieval system. Spending funds on technology in other areas of the college provided sustainable growth.

Figure 3 not only shows the increase to enrollment and retention at this HEI but it further demonstrates the impacts of its investments. In fall of 2020, this college's enrollment was at a historical high, reaching 2,043 total students. Between fall 2019 and fall 2020, the college's enrollment grew by 1 percent. Subsequently the overall growth from 2017–2020 shows a steady increase of approximately 1.2 percent growth year over year. This data and the current findings as stated previously highlight that these investments played a significant role in this HEI's ability to maintain growth. When using IPEDS to pull retention/graduation rates, it was determined that in 2018, IPEDS no longer used associate-level degree graduation rates to be a part of their reporting. They moved to only utilizing baccalaureate degrees in their reporting requirements. Due to this HEI not having students conferred in the baccalaureate degrees as of yet, it made pulling this information difficult, because it would not represent the college's accurate retention/graduations rates from 2018 to 2020 due to students not completing their bachelor's degree and being included in the report.

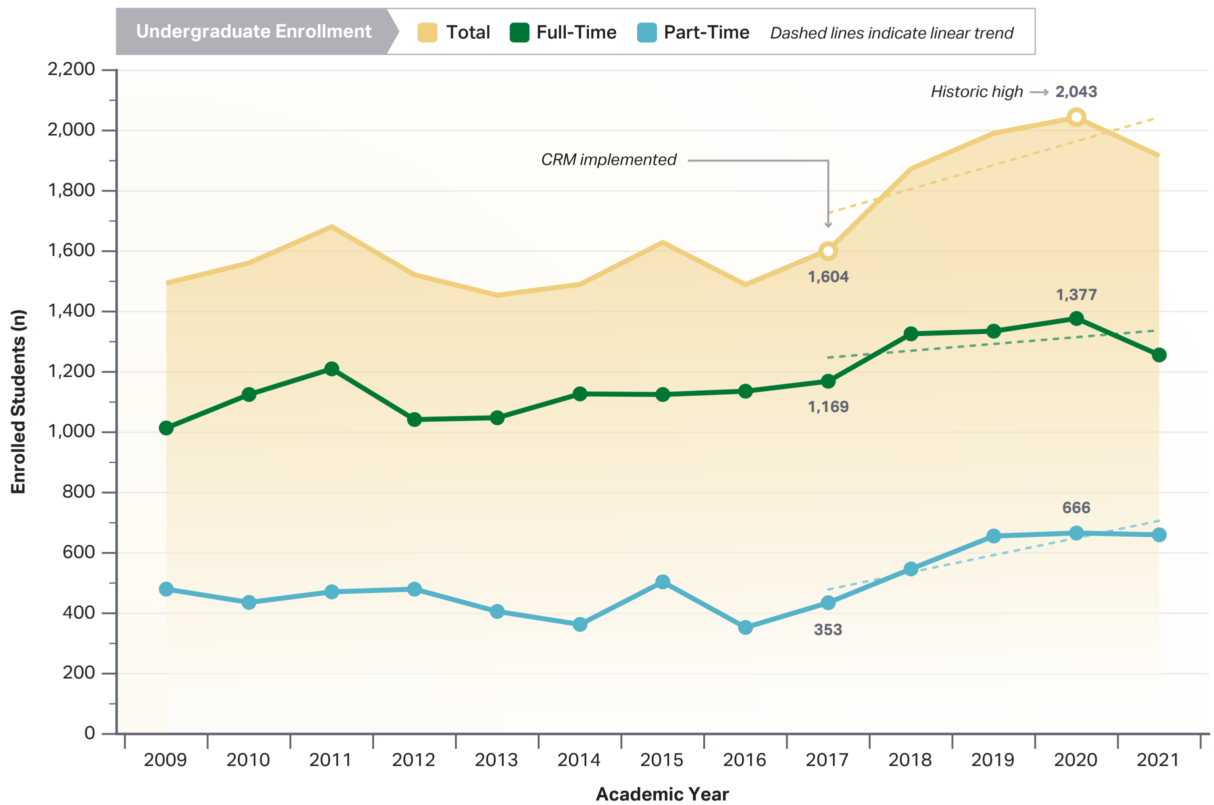

FIGURE 3 ➤ Enrollment Trends from 2009–2021

Source: Case study institution's internal enrollment management data

Summary

The overall findings of this study were that this institution, contrary to an overwhelming number of institutions in the country, yielded positive enrollment outcomes. The data's trustworthiness was checked throughout the study and was found to be credible. Results were in line with the research question and followed the emerging themes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges to higher education. Through this qualitative case study of one small nonprofit institution of higher education in Pennsylvania, it became clear that the pandemic, and the changes it forced many institutions to undergo, did not negatively impact the enrollment of this institution. This institution was forward thinking in their strategic planning as they invested in and incorporated new technology and personnel and built an online division to enhance enrollment and retention. Their enhanced connections to the community helped to establish partnership agreements that provided scholarships to their current and/or future employees who enrolled in programs at this institution.

Summary of Findings

The main research questions "What are the enrollment and retention challenges during a time of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the strategies that one small private college used to address enrollment and retention challenges? The study identified three themes regarding the research questions? The themes were (a) enrollment strategies, (b) retention strategies, and (c) institutional strategies.

For theme 1 and 2 (a and b), all participants stated the reason for steady enrollment and retention during the pandemic was due to:

- Institutional collaboration;
- Technological support systems; and
- Scholarships.

Lastly, for theme 3 (c), participants described institutional restructuring through:

- Creation of new positions;
- Technological investments; and
- Community partnerships

The overall findings from this study revealed significant institutional involvement and collaboration from all departments, which ensured enrollment and retention were of paramount importance. Interestingly, none of the participants incorporated the efforts of the faculty and their impact on enrollment and retention, which was assumedly significant given their modified settings to perform their roles. The significant investments made in areas of technology, programs, and the online division by this HEI prior to the pandemic enhanced their overall ability to maintain the operational effectiveness of "business as usual," through a worldwide shut down. Prior proper planning through strategic development also supported their direct impacts to their enrollment and retention. Working with community partners helped secure the financial dollars needed to help the student body overcome financial barriers.

- Enrollment and retention rely on developing the institutional strategic goals to guide their outcomes, and the collaboration of all responsible departments.
- Investments in technology for higher education is important for enrollment and retention goals and outcomes.
  - → CRM (customer relation management software) such as Spectrum EMP, JRM Salesforce, and Starfish are essential to the overall support of student success in higher education.
  - → LMS (learning management software) Canvas provides the connection between student and faculty in and out of the classroom.
  - → Zoom provided the window to face-to-face connectivity in crisis when there were no in-person options.
  - → Microsoft Suits (TEAMS) provided connectivity as well.
- Creating an online division before the COVID-19 crisis helped to enroll a new population of students. The investment enhanced the overall technological infrastructure of the online division as well as student success.
- HEIs need to examine their organizational structure through strategic planning to ensure that personnel oversee and collaborate with other departments on enrollment and retention. The implementation of organizational change management theory helps HEIs to secure personnel who oversee areas of retention and enrollment through multi-departmental collaboration and communication.
- Flexibility during current crises and/or situations is needed to maintain focus on overall goals and initiatives in order to provide guidance to staff, faculty, and students.
- Community partnerships created a new pipeline of students and financial support targeting employees who required training.

Conclusion

It can be determined that institutional strategic planning formed the foundation needed to guide organizational change management through a time of crisis. This HEI's master plan helped to build the roadmap securing the technological investments and infrastructure needed to sustain their enrollment and retention during the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaboration from all departments further provided student success ensuring that the institutional growth and development was met. Securing an online learning platform, customer relation software and creation of the new position director of eLearning further enhanced this HEI's ability to maintain virtual learning environments and outcomes throughout the pandemic. Their foresight and planning could be a desirable model for similar HEIs in order to sustain growth and development.

Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendation for future research began during the research study presented in the literature review. The following recommendations will enhance the current research and future studies. Based on the review of the literature and findings of these studies, it is recommended that:

- Further research be conducted to explore frameworks and methods based on strategic planning in organizational management.
- Research is conducted comparing influences of technologies associated with student learning platforms and outcomes through various LMS systems at different institutions to compare retention rates and graduation rates.
- This qualitative case study be replicated using a larger pool of participants from different small, private, nonprofit institutions throughout the state.
- A study is conducted using quantitative data to compare findings of enrollment and retention challenges during periods of crisis.
- More research on investments in higher education such as technological software that impact growth and development through enrollment and retention is investigated.
- A subsequent study focuses on senior faculty or faculty senate leadership and their role in enrollment and retention during a crisis.
- A future study comparing this institution's success to national trends in enrollment and retention be conducted.

For practitioners, convening an enrollment management committee that examines business continuity would be a topic worth engaging. It would also be beneficial to consider sending teams to various industry trade conferences that consist of mixed professionals. In other words, at an LMS conference, in addition to the online learning and IT staff, asking an enrollment professional, a marketing professional, and a member of institutional research could enable a wider team to become more versed in the tool. Similarly, enrollment conferences should have attendees from finance and academics join the enrollment team.

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About the Author

Jennifer Passenti

Jennifer Passenti, Ed.D., is the Director of the Lake Region Center of Lackawanna College, located in Hawley, Pennsylvania. Lackawanna College has seven campuses across Northeast Pennsylvania, with the main campus located in Scranton. Passenti has worked at Lackawanna College for the past thirteen years, first serving as an adjunct professor, followed by enrollment specialist, and for the last six years as the director of the campus.

As the director, Passenti is responsible for performance management and hiring of all faculty and staff positions; overseeing and administering all programs, services and activities at the center; developing and implementing the center's marketing plan; evaluating program offerings to ensure their fiscal viability and that they meet the needs of the community; and ensuring the center is compliant with all federal, state, institutional and accreditation guidelines and regulations.

Prior to coming to Lackawanna College, Passenti worked for the New York City Board of Education where she taught in The Bronx for many years. She earned her master's degree in elementary education at Mercy College, and a bachelor's degree in speech communications and public relations from Kutztown University. Passenti also holds professional certifications in both Six Sigma Green Belt and Lean Six Sigma through Villanova University, and completed her Ed.D. at Fairleigh Dickinson University.