



Best Practices: Recruitment and Enrollment of Online Students
Prepared by
The Learning House, Inc.
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According to a recent Sloan Foundation report, online education has reached its “tipping point,” and it is poised to expand dramatically. Has the number of students enrolled in your online education programs reached the tipping point yet? The Sloan Foundation surveyed more than 1000 colleges and universities and found that the number of students enrolled in online courses has exceeded expectations. The year-to-year growth rate of 24.8% exceeded the 19.8% predicted growth rate. The Sloan Foundation estimated that 2.6 million students had enrolled in online courses by the end of the 2004 calendar year. (Allen, I.E., & Seaman, J., 2004).

When “tipping points” occur in any market, the competition for the product being marketed increases. The competition for students in online programs is becoming fierce. We, at Learning House, see and feel this increased pace of online learning. Small colleges, unless they adopt some of the enrollment strategies of big institutions, are being squeezed out of the market by big institutions of higher education with lots of marketing funds.

Learning House, as your partner in online learning, has been very successful in teaming with you to bring thousands of student inquiries to your campus. However, we see a problem: the disconnect between student inquiries and student enrollment in online programs. We have found that personnel at small colleges are not adequately prepared to process student inquiries for online programs and to effectively enroll the students in a program. Therefore, we have prepared a set of best practice procedures for enrolling online students. We encourage your institution to consider these guidelines.

1. Be prepared to handle the student inquiry.
 - a. Establish a personal connection with potential students.
 - b. Build the potential students’ confidence in their abilities to take online courses and the institution’s ability to meet their needs.
 - c. Emphasize the application process. Potential students cannot begin the process of enrollment without an application. Encourage the student to quickly complete an application and pay the processing fee. The application should be submitted online, and the application fee should be paid online.
 - d. Talk to the student. Make the student feel good about your institution. Provide information about your mission and convey the excitement of learning.

2. Provide well-trained personnel to handle student inquiries.
 - a. Personnel should be well-versed with the Internet.
 - b. Personnel should be able to demonstrate a sample course.
 - c. Personnel should be able to convey the excitement of taking a course online.
 - d. Personnel should be able to discuss the programs offered online.
 - e. Personnel should be able to link students to faculty advisors and to financial aid personnel. (Stay on the line with the student until her/his needs are met.)
 - f. Personnel should be able to initiate the admissions process. (Take information via the phone, email or the Internet.)

3. Maintain a personal connection with potential students.
 - a. Personnel should call student inquirers within 24 hours of initial contact (e.g. information request) to start the application process.
 - b. Personnel should send additional material as needed within 48 hours (program information and information about the institution). Packets about the program should be prepared in advance.
 - c. Personnel should call student inquirers to follow-up on receipt of materials, to answer questions and to move the application process forward.
 - d. Personnel should continue to provide friendly follow-up via email and phone, even if the student does not enroll. Experience has shown that quality, friendly student service results in high enrollments.

The Learning House, Inc. will be expanding on these examples of how to recruit and enroll online students. A more extensive set of materials will be provided to you in the near future. Meanwhile, we recommend that you consider the above practices for increasing your enrollment in online programs.

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Sloan-C Consortium Report

Allen, I.E., & Seaman, J. (2004, November 12). *Entering the Mainstream: The Quality and Extent of Online Education in the U. S., 2003 and 2004*. Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium.

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<http://www.sloan-c.org/resources/survey04.asp>

http://www.sloan-c.org/resources/entering_mainstream.pdf

