



CASE STUDY:

Increasing graduate enrollment university-wide

How the University of North Alabama created a successful, scalable enrollment process

For several consecutive years, the University of North Alabama (UNA) College of Business experienced declining enrollments in its Master's in Business Administration (MBA) program—part of a widespread downward trend among MBA programs in the U.S. In response, the college began looking for student-centric ways to improve the recruiting experience and improve efficiency in admissions and enrollment.

The College of Business (COB) decided to implement both a new process methodology, Rapid Improvement, and a new solution, Ellucian CRM Recruit, in order to eliminate redundant efforts and give its staff more time to offer in-depth assistance to prospects.

The COB's changes led to a doubling of its enrollment numbers—a result so significant that UNA's three other colleges have partnered with the COB team to learn its methods and create their own success stories.



Graduate enrollment

1,489 students (as of Spring 2019)

Primary challenge

Increase graduate student enrollment and improve efficiencies in the recruiting process

Solutions

Ellucian CRM Recruit

Results

218 percent increase in MBA program new student enrollment

Transparency throughout the admissions funnel

Efficiencies in recruitment and enrollment

Identifying and eliminating inefficiencies

At the project's outset, the COB formed a collaborative, cross-functional team that included business-school and graduate-enrollment faculty and staff. The team decided to optimize its new technical capabilities with one of the approaches it teaches in its Center for Professional Development: Rapid Improvement with Lean Tools methodology, which focuses on continuous improvement and maximizing customer value with a minimal waste of resources.

The team began by using their robust new data sets to map their entire recruitment, application, and enrollment operation. The purpose: to identify—and ultimately eliminate—slow, manual, duplicative, and error-prone processes.

"When you map a process, you see the many ways that you're wasting the time of both the prospect and the recruiter on activities that the Ellucian product can handle," says Gregory Carnes, dean of the College of Business. "Using CRM Recruit as part of the process map allowed us to make transparent the whole step-by-step journey that the student and university have to go through—from a lead to nurturing the prospect to the prospect applying to admitting the prospect to registration as a student in their first class."

The mapping process soon led to a key change: a move to a paperless system for application management and review.

Focusing on the prospect experience

Ning Wang, UNA's online MBA program manager, cites the new paperless approach as critical to increasing visibility and helping staff understand their students' needs better.

"At every point when we're talking to a student, we take notes about the conversation and keep them all in CRM Recruit," she says. "There is no paper involved at all, which helps the whole team greatly."

As the recruiters add to the system, building increasingly detailed prospect profiles over time, they're developing holistic views of prospects in the funnel stages that will help them guide students to their next steps more effectively.

"There is transparency about where the students stand," Wang says, "so we're able to know each particular case and where they are in the process, and to keep their goals in our mind as we talk to them. If there's any help needed, we can provide that based on their individual needs. And," she adds, "for cross-training purposes, any employee on the recruiting team can see where the students are at—so any of us can jump in and help them along the way."

The solution's enhanced communication tools have also allowed the university to forge stronger relationships with prospective students by removing roadblocks during application and nurturing stages. UNA now has more channels for outreach, a dynamic and responsive

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NING WANG, Manager of Online MBA Programs, University of North Alabama

application process, and the ability to follow up on incomplete applications.

Together, the improvements have allowed staff to spend more value-added time with prospects during the critical juncture when they're weighing their enrollment decision. The numbers tell the story: last year, UNA's MBA students reported a 97 percent satisfaction rate with the recruitment process. Most significantly, the COB's enrollment metrics have dramatically improved—including a remarkable 218 percent enrollment increase in new students—with no loosening of admissions standards, and despite a 20 percent tuition increase during the same period.

Building on success, campus-wide

The COB's system and process-improvement work have resulted in other key benefits. Detailed course-registration data has given the college valuable insights into faculty load, course capacities, and course popularity, driving data-backed decisions as the COB continually assesses its offerings and adjusts its entrance requirements, prerequisites, registration availability, length of classes, and types of classes.

The COB now works closely with UNA's other three colleges on their own process improvements and recruiting practices. In the spirit of continuous improvement, team members regularly collaborate during ongoing Rapid Improvement

Events, when stakeholders gather to quickly identify and resolve new issues and action items.

"We've been able to bring all four colleges on board and have everyone collaborating together so that we're all working to maximize the resources of the system and make improvements that benefit everyone," says Hillary Coats, UNA's associate director of graduate studies. "I welcome getting feedback about how we can improve. And that's where we get that synergy to make the process even better."

Speaking of improvements: since the implementation of the new process and system in 2016, graduate enrollment for the College of Arts and Sciences have grown by 26 percent, thanks to its new recruitment structure and improved online program promotion. Graduate enrollment at the College of Education and Human Sciences has increased 11 percent. This year the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions' new family nurse practitioner track attracted a large number of applicants and more than doubled the number of new student enrollment vs. students in the MSN program for Fall 2019. "Without the structure that we have in place, we would not be able to handle the increase in application volume to scale," Coats says.

Coats credits the College of Business for their innovation and influence. "The COB was the model," she says. "They were the frontrunners on working with the CRM, using funnel metrics, and creating structured automated communications



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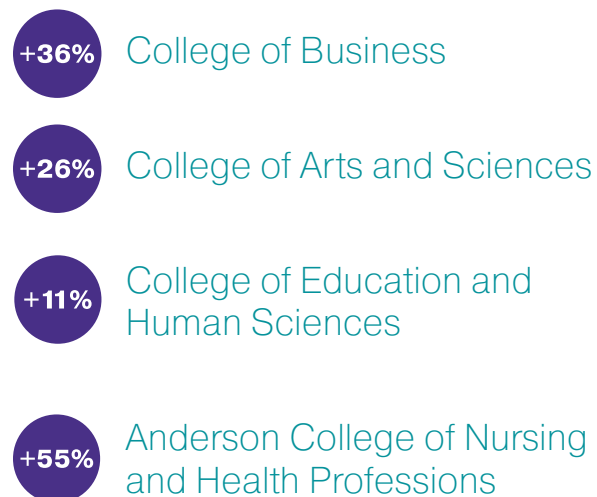
GREGORY CARNES, Dean of the College of Business, University of North Alabama

with prospective students. Now, we're able to make changes quickly, and that has helped each of the colleges. Having this tool has been instrumental university-wide.”

“When you let the software accomplish the work that it can do, and free up a recruiter for a substantive discussion, our relationship-building goes to a higher level than just a ‘fill out the form’ level,” concludes Carnes. “Without CRM Recruit, the project would not have succeeded.”

Improving graduate student enrollment

Increases by graduate school*



*Overall graduate enrollment, Spring 2017–Spring 2019

Decrease in admission approval processing time

Several weeks  **UNDER 24 HOURS**



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