

Southern Utah University finds a greater return on investment



About Southern Utah University

Southern Utah University is a caring campus community where students come to explore their interests and prepare for meaningful careers and life experiences, with more than 140 undergraduate and 19 graduate programs.

Solutions used

- RNL Advanced FinAid Solutions
- RNL Applicant Cultivator
- RNL College Student Inventory
- RNL Demand Builder
- RNL Forecast*Plus*
- RNL Recruitment Consulting
- RNL Strategic Enrollment Planning
- RNL Yield Campaign

About RNL Complete Enrollment

RNL Complete Enrollment gives you the most advanced platform for meeting big enrollment management challenges. It delivers the research, data, expertise, analytics, and technology to sustain success across all areas of enrollment.

Identifying an opportunity

Up until 2015, enrollment at Southern Utah University (SUU) was turbulent. For the previous seven years, numbers had been inconsistent and falling, and applications were weak. “We generated applications, but felt that they weren’t good quality. Of all the applications, only 20 percent enrolled,” said Ellen Treanor, assistant vice president, brand strategy.

SUU was looking for data-informed solutions that would mobilize the entire campus around enrollment management efforts.

Establishing a plan to boost enrollment

SUU began work with Ruffalo Noel Levitz in 2015, investing in solutions for multiple areas of enrollment, including RNL Applicant Cultivator, RNL Demand Builder, RNL Recruitment Consulting, RNL Forecast*Plus*, RNL Advanced FinAid Solutions, RNL Strategic Enrollment Planning, and RNL Yield Campaign.

The first step was to gain an outside perspective of the problem from RNL and realize that the entire campus would need to collaborate to create a solution. To accomplish this, consultants through RNL Strategic Enrollment Planning helped facilitate a cross-functional team to identify areas of improvement for the institution to boost enrollment.

The SUU team sourced ideas from across campus to increase enrollment. Those who submitted proposals made their case to the SUU cabinet, showing new-student projections and cost. Ultimately, 14 initiatives received funding.

“It came down to what are the needs of the university? What will help the overall mission and goals?” said Brandon Wright, assistant vice president for enrollment management. “Every department can try to bid for a portion of money. I really went after things that would have a return on investment.”

Many initiatives focused on giving students a personalized experience from the first time they come into contact.

Among the strategies were:

- Campus tours personalized to match student goals, including a personalized financial aid appointment. Last year, SUU provided 500 more campus tours than in the previous year.
- Having meaningful phone conversations with prospective students to see why they were or weren't attending SUU. Student feedback helped SUU refine and polish admissions and recruitment communications to reflect what students were saying.
- Custom advising support, followed up with a class schedule suited to the student's wants and needs. This provides extra support for first-generation students and helps all students stay on track without getting discouraged.
- Pursuing out-of-state recruitment to reach a wider audience of prospective students.

A successful initiative

SUU's efforts, with guidance from RNL, paid off both in-state and out-of-state. The university accomplished the following:

- A 40 percent increase in total freshman applications from 2015 to 2017 (to-date), including an increase of 49 percent in-state and 13 percent out-of-state.
- A 21 percent increase in new freshman deposits since 2016, including a year-over-year deposit increase of 19 percent in-state and 27 percent out-of-state.
- A 51 percent increase in new freshman enrollment from 2015 to 2017 (to-date). So far, SUU new freshman enrollment has increased 22 percent for out-of-state and 15 percent in-state over the past year.
- Maintained small class size and low student-faculty ratio, as well as grade point average and ACT scores for incoming freshmen.

SUU aims to build on the energetic growth and vitality on campus and continue finding new ways to connect with students. "RNL helped us look at enrollment management holistically. Not just more students, but the right kind of students," said Stuart Jones, vice president for advancement and enrollment management.

The university continues to prioritize student experience and customer service as a way to get students in the door to stay.

"Your name isn't going to get you the growth you need," Wright said. "Don't wait for your ship; build your ship. Be that friend to the counselors, provide that better tour, and get to know that student and their family."

KEY RESULTS

40% INCREASE

TOTAL FRESHMAN
APPLICATIONS, 2015-17

21% INCREASE

TOTAL NEW FRESHMAN
DEPOSITS SINCE 2016

51% INCREASE

NEW FRESHMAN
ENROLLMENT SINCE 2015

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Stuart Jones
Vice President for
Advancement and
Enrollment Management at
Southern Utah University