



RNL Complete Enrollment™—RNL Demand Builder and RNL Applicant Cultivator

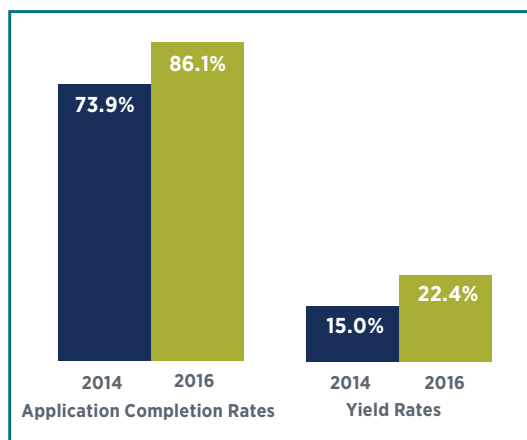
Simmons College

It's all about getting the right **applicants**, not just generating more **applications**

Simmons College was in a good place in fall 2015. One year after enrolling the smallest class in its history, the freshman class of this Massachusetts college was now its largest ever. Not a small feat for this private, liberal arts women's college in Boston. It was the type of success you'd want to replicate. So—for many people—it was a bit of a shock when the college *completely changed* its recruitment and marketing approach for the class entering in fall 2016. Why make such a seemingly risky move?

Dr. John F. Dolan, vice president of enrollment management at Simmons since 2014, explains, "Our system was full with applications that didn't necessarily behave the way we needed or wanted...and required too much time and energy to manage." He chose to partner with Ruffalo Noel Levitz to more effectively manage their enrollment stream.

(Continue reading next page...*The perils of inflated applications*)



Utilizing RNL Complete Enrollment, Simmons College:



More than doubled the inquiry-to-application rate from the search



Identified the 15% of inquirers who comprised nearly **1/3** of freshman enrollees

The perils of inflated applications

In making this decision, Dr. Dolan had taken a close look at the numbers. Applications had more than doubled since 2007: to the casual observer, a positive indicator of demand. Yet the number of offers of acceptance remained steady—and not by a concerted decision to become more selective. Rather, it was because the number of completed applications actually remained flat over the same period.

This meant the college’s system was handling a growing number of applications and the admissions team was becoming increasingly bogged down with trying to get them to an actionable status. Having to focus on the logistics of application materials limited the meaningful conversations counselors could have with interested students and their families—and lower yield rates showed it. Dolan believed it was time to reconsider how they built and cultivated the college’s inquiry and applicant pools.

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We had never seen that before.

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Refocusing on genuine interest

In partnering with RNL to recruit and enroll its class entering for fall 2016, Simmons College utilized RNL Demand Builder. We employed customized predictive analytics and our multi-channel creative communications approach to strengthen Simmons’ search program, which included rising seniors. We also surveyed students in the inquiry pool, scored their enrollment propensity using predictive analytics, and engaged with them via an extended and customized fulfillment campaign. Finally, we targeted potential applicants and managed the logistics of the application-seeking process with RNL Applicant Cultivator.

An effective search builds a solid inquiry and applicant pool, attracting inquirers who are more likely to apply, complete their application, and enroll. Like its applicant pool, Simmons’ recent inquiry pools were inflated with inquirers who weren’t converting through the enrollment stream. The RNL-managed search program identified and targeted the students most likely to be a fit for and be interested in the Simmons experience, resulting in a smaller but more interested pool. The focus was both on educating students about the college and providing them opportunities to learn about the institution on their terms.

As students entered the inquiry pool, we worked to survey their interest level and interests. This allowed the Simmons counselors to shift their focus toward the students who were the best fit for the college and to provide those students the specific information they sought. RNL Applicant Cultivator then focused on the nuts-and-bolts of asking students to apply: we cultivated true applicants rather than simply generating applications. Because we kept staff apprised of the status of each potential applicant, the team could spend its time

encouraging enthusiastic applicants, addressing the specific concerns of on-the-fencers, and devoting time to effectively counseling prospective enrollees—rather than endlessly pursuing missing application documents.

With this partnership, Simmons College was able to realign its energies away from simply generating more applications toward getting the right applicants. The team's first priority was building relationships with prospective Simmons students and their families, and the success of the partnership had positive effects on the institution, its students, and the admissions team itself.

Adapting to a new approach

Telling your campus that you're experiencing what was ultimately a 27 percent decrease in applications is enough to cause panic, despite the very promising indicator of a rise in campus visits that fall. Dr. Dolan is the first to admit that there was more than a little trepidation on campus as their first early action deadline neared. The raw application numbers didn't live up to the previous year, and he realized they needed to assess (and report on) different metrics because this was a very different approach. A closer look at the status of the first round of early action applications painted a more promising picture. "Our file completion rate was 97 percent. We had never seen that before." Without changing its admission standards, Simmons had the same number of offers of acceptance to keep it on track for its yield and enrollment targets. The trend continued through the second early action and regular decision deadlines.

What's more, with its inquiry pool now qualified, the team could see that the number of prospective students who had a very high interest in Simmons was, in Dr. Dolan's words, "through the roof."

Focusing on applicants—not applications

With RNL providing unprecedented intelligence on each prospective student, the counselors were able to focus their own outreach. They could do seemingly simple things that made a tremendous difference. For example, they could reach out to all of their prospective students who hadn't yet filed financial aid forms and advise them on the process. In the past, the applicant volume prevented being able to achieve that in the tight timeline necessary. "The team became so much more efficient. They had more time to connect with their prospective students and strengthen those relationships. They really understood their students," said Dolan.

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Focusing on the right numbers

Explaining the new approach and its benefit to students is great, but in assessing and projecting enrollment to the campus, it's still about numbers. It's just that the numbers they needed to look at were different now. "We needed to educate our community," Dr. Dolan explains. With the support, insights, and counsel of the RNL team, Simmons rebuilt its metrics to evaluate the applicant pool, including building a 13-point affinity metric. "It was still a bit of a leap of faith," Dolan admits, "but by March 11 we knew we had it."

Indeed they did. **The college surpassed its enrollment, SAT, and diversity targets and enrolled the second-largest class in school history—all while reducing the discount rate by nearly one point.** An even surer measure that they had more effectively engaged the right students? Yield rose from less than 15 percent two years prior to over 22 percent for this class.

With this accomplishment, Simmons has built a great foundation for future success.

Student and staff retention

Forging stronger relationships with students earlier in the process is a great building block for retention. Historically, RNL client results demonstrate that students engaged via RNL Demand Builder retain at a rate higher than students who are not. But it goes beyond that. "This is the first year in forever

that we've kept our admissions team," Dr. Dolan shares. When staff isn't pleading for application completions that will never happen, they can actually make connections with truly interested students. The relationships they cultivate continue into freshman orientation and beyond. Enabling the team to become more invested in the institution's students provides them more job satisfaction and helps them become more effective recruiters and counselors.

Informed planning moving forward

As they aren't focused on recruiting and training new staff members, the Simmons team can focus on planning for the next recruitment cycle. Without having to shift territories, they feel better about travel planning. Beyond that, Dr. Dolan is applying the approaches they've adopted on the undergraduate side to the way they recruit for their five graduate schools. And, because the switch to RNL Complete Enrollment saved the institution a substantial amount of budget dollars, they are able to redirect some of those funds to strengthening their message of women's leadership.

Beyond optimizing institutional resources and enrollment, the Simmons College-Ruffalo Noel Levitz partnership has enabled the college to strengthen its connection with its incoming freshmen and future graduates.

Case study published with the permission of Simmons College

Learn more

Call **800.876.1117** or email ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com to find out how you and your team can follow the example of Simmons to build and cultivate a stronger inquiry and applicant pool using **RNL Complete Enrollment.**