



The Career College Information Source

Putting the Students' Best Interest First

Admissions and Marketing at Keiser University

*With Brian J. Woods, M.S., Ed.
Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management*

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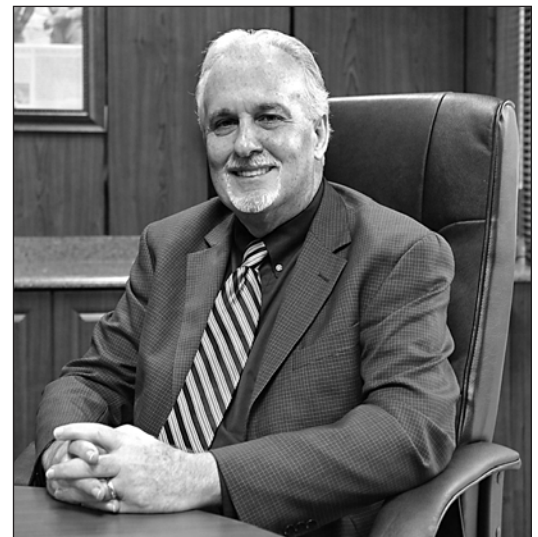
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Putting students first has been Keiser University's philosophy for over 30 years. According to the school's Web site, Keiser's philosophy is based on a belief that students learn more in an environment where they feel safe, connected, and valued. For those reasons KU emphasizes a collaborative educational experience for every student, and that includes every department collaborating with each other to ensure a student's success—both in school and after graduation.

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Keiser makes certain that students experience those feelings from their first contact with the admissions department. So it's important that every member of the school's admissions team puts the best interest of the students first, that they believe in protecting the reputation of the institution, and that they feel accomplished at the end of the day, knowing they not only did things right, but did the right thing for their students.



Brian J. Woods, M.S., Ed., Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management.

“Whether the student enrolls or did not enroll, there is comfort in knowing we proceeded with the right approach in putting the student's interest first and making an informed decision together with them,” explained Brian J. Woods, M.S., Ed. and vice chancellor of enrollment management at Keiser, adding that they attempt to hire people who have that core value in their admissions philosophy. “You have to identify from the beginning during the interviewing process and spend a great deal of time exploring the prospects' motivation. You must

cover why they want to be in admissions and what type of employment in the past supports the intention to take care of our students and help change people's lives through education. So, if you have this as part of the vetting process upfront and you have all the skills to accomplish this, you hopefully can make the correct decisions about hiring the right people. It's a lengthy discovery process that is based on experience and attitudes."

All schools aspire to achieve a certain number and reach enrollment goals, but Woods believes that if you take care of the student, have the right attitude and foster integrity in the process, that experience will inspire the student to make a confident decision to enroll.

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there with the correct intentions and attitude. The results are happy counselors and students," Woods said. "On the contrary, if you focus only on the numbers and only on the metrics, then you will be frustrated because that is not going to

result in success. I think a culture that fosters this environment will experience the desired outcomes. If you don't lead and believe in the mission to help others, then you can't change lives. People are very sophisticated today. Intention, attitude and behaviors determine success."

Keiser's admissions interview process is structured to ensure compliance issues are not jeopardized. It is

important to make sure it is a shared, informed decision by the counselor and the student.

"(The interview process is one-on-one) and is a confidential student questionnaire. It follows a hierarchy covering the appropriate area at the appropriate time. The sequence provides a decision-making process that makes sense. Counselors are advised not to jump ahead or fall behind the appropriate order of questioning. For example, the benefits of our curriculum prior to qualification of the student would be inappropriate. Admissions has to uncover, through a series of open-ended questions, where the student has been, where he or she currently is in life and his or her current needs to get ahead," Woods said. "If we can meet those needs, the next part of the hierarchy in the interview is the benefit of our school that may just be a solution to achieving the student's goals. So the structured hierarchy and effective communication help bring the student through the decision-making process. It's a major decision in his or her life. The questionnaire is filled out and it's a part of the student's record."

This subtle approach to recruiting in admissions works if implemented properly.

"You can blend the counseling aspect with the assertive recruiting. I think you have to do the counseling first and once you identify the student is qualified you have earned the right to direct and recruit with more assertiveness," Woods said. "But, you have to do the soft part first; identify it is the right candidate and then you actually direct them through the process. A totally sales approach is often an easier approach and can result in success. However, long-term it may be a disservice to the school and the student."

While admissions counselors are not constantly monitored by administrative personnel, there are some day-to-day activities that are regularly checked. Such activities include how many people they're talking to in a day, how many incoming calls they're handling and how many outgoing inquiries they're following up with.

"We're more concerned with those activities because we know if they're busy and they talk to enough people and they're adhering to our training tools, scripts and outlines, that they'll see more people. Then we monitor how many people they see in a day and how many interviews come in. Obviously, the metrics are important to measure performance" said Woods, adding that they go over the list of those who did not enroll and discuss the reason for that decision, whether it be a legitimate reason or that the counselor failed to help the student in some way. "So there's a daily monitoring of activity. There's a weekly monitoring of follow-up. Because we have starts every month, we want to know how they interface with the other departments—academics and financial aid. We are one enrollment team and are interdependent with all departments that support the student to show up and start class. Admissions take care of the decision, based on an educational choice and a career path. Financial commitments are handled through the financial aid office. So we're dependent on them. It's a total team effort."

For compliance purposes, Keiser also self-regulates through a variety of means, including "secret shoppers," someone on staff actually making calls, and people conducting in-person visits. Woods said it's important to take the initiative and self-regulate. It helps with compliance and identifying training needs. That way you can see

firsthand how your students are being treated.

Of course, having a great admissions counselor is largely dependent on the training he or she receives. At Keiser they have four tiers of training. The initial tier is campus-based with the director of admissions, who facilitates a 10-day orientation

process with new counselors. That training involves going over campus culture, inter-departmental understanding, product knowledge with the programs that are offered, and an orientation of the campus. The second training tier consists of regional

admissions personnel doing onsite visits and working with new hires.

"We have designated regional admissions people, associate vice chancellors, who reinforce and check on the DOA training to make sure it's being done properly. The third tier is a formal group training for all new hires at the Office of the Chancellor. This is a focused training session on culture, roles and responsibilities, and reviewing all aspects of the enrollment process and training materials. The Chancellor, vice chancellors and any other appropriate administrators share information pertaining to the admissions and enrollment process dictated by our admissions manuals. This group is from all campuses together as one group, and we indoctrinate them to our philosophy and reinforce all previous training from regional personnel and the campus. We specifically go through and check, for example, the interview

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process. We do role-playing with them, checking to make sure that everything that's supposed to be done is done properly," Woods explained. "In addition to that, the

fourth tier is a follow-up online component where they have to complete modules online every week after they leave the first three tiers of training. We have an online training specialist that is the facilitator. They enroll online and complete one module a week. There's a test at the end of each module. They complete all the modules and every module relates to all the training they had up until that point."

A typical module would be phone communication, covering all aspects of outbound and inbound calls, as well as what steps to cover when appointing a student.

"They have reading material to review. There's multiple choice, true/false and an essay question. If they fail to achieve satisfactory grades, then that triggers further training and coaching," Woods said. "We notify the director of admissions at the campus to bring them in and do some additional training."

In an age where so many professions insist on a new hire having some level of previous experience, Woods said that is not necessarily a theory to which he subscribes when it comes to hiring admissions counselors. All recruits must have a bachelor's degree, but beyond that, it's a case-by-case basis.

"At certain times and in certain environments, it works (to hire someone with previous experience). In this environment it can be risky

because some schools have been cited; bad habits are sometimes hard to break. So we're more cautious than ever about people who have had previous experience in admissions. Personally, I know there are very good admissions people out there that work at other school groups and are operating with integrity. Identifying those people and bringing them through a process would require much more rigor today," Woods said. "My preference is to find people who we can mold and nurture in our modality, with no habits and no baggage; tabula rasa, a blank tablet when they come in and are ready and eager to learn. I think, today, this would be my preference."

Woods, who has worked in admissions since 1975, said it really hasn't changed much over the years, at least in terms of communicating with prospective students, dealing with parents, or dealing with people who need to make a change. The only thing that has changed dramatically is the amount of technology that's available to enhance your ability to communicate with students through texting, e-mail, cell phones, etc.

"It's still a one-on-one experience; it's personal communication and the decision-making process is the same. The only thing that's really changed is the technology. The other thing that's changed is the preponderance of schools. There are just so many choices for our students. They're more confused than ever. We need to bring them out of the confusion and into a clear direction in their lives," Woods said. "I think the choices for online, the choices for ground schools, the size of the schools, and the amount of outbound contact students receive from a multitude of schools is out of control. They're

getting bombarded on the Internet. Once you inquire, you're going to get inundated with emails and calls. So we have to really be careful that we don't overwhelm students and become indifferent. The technology can cause a rigid perception. We need to maintain the presence of the soft caring approach in our communication. Too much technical dependency for student contact can interfere with the patience, empathy, and guidance our students need.

"There are two main aspects to our evaluation of students. The qualitative aspect, or the interview, is one. (The counselors) have to be trained on what the students' motivations are; the educational background. Does the student fully understand what is involved in the curriculum and the rigor of the curriculum? Do they understand the type of career they're going to be preparing for? That's very subjective," said Woods. "Number two is the quantitative aspect, or the entrance evaluation, with required cut scores for each program. It's the combination of the qualitative or subjective part of the interview, which can

take an hour or more, and then the quantitative part of the entrance evaluation along with prior transcripts from other schools that determines if it is the right fit for the student. (If a student affirms) 'I have the time to devote to school, I have a complete understanding of my major and the career path, I understand my financial commitment, and I believe this school is the place I belong,' then we will recommend application. On the other hand if they say, 'No, I don't fully understand,' or 'I'm not sure,' then we have to say, 'Let's rethink this and maybe we need to re-evaluate where you're going to go.' If a referral is needed, we'll make a referral to an alternative school if it better suits the student's needs. It's all about the student and what is in his or her best interest."

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REVIEW

Written by Cheryl Hentz.

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