How to Increase Enrollment By Better Understanding Prospective Graduate Students

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We help schools support students from enrollment to graduation and beyond.

 ROOTED IN RESEARCH
 7,500+ Peer-tested best practices
 500+ Enrollment innovations tested annually

 ADVANTAGE OF SCALE
 1,500+ Institutions served
 3.7 M+ Students supported by our SSMS

 WE DELIVER RESULTS
 95% Of our partners continue with us year after year, reflecting the goals we achieve together

 › Find and enroll your right-fit students
 › Support and graduate more students
 › Prepare your institution for the future
Northern Arizona University in Brief

A public research university in Flagstaff, Arizona with a total enrollment of ~31,000 students

NAU Graduate College
- 125 graduate degree and certificate programs
- $3M in graduate assistantship and tuition waiver funding
- 4,223 students enrolled

+5.7% growth in enrollment since 2018
1. Understanding Today’s Graduate Students

2. Designing Student-Centric Programs

3. Diagnostic Activity
Graduate Competition Is Increasing

Program Growth Outpacing Student Growth, Driving Up Recruitment Costs

Growth in Graduate Programs vs. Students

**Online Graduate**
2013-2017, EAB Research

- Public 4-year Students: 46%
- Private 4-year Students: 43%
- Public 4-year Programs: 58%
- Private 4-year Programs: 65%

**Ground-Based Graduate**
2013-2017, EAB Research

- Public 4-year Students: 4%
- Private 4-year Students: 5%
- Public 4-year Programs: 12%
- Private 4-year Programs: 14%

Explosive Program Growth Wreaking Havoc on Recruiting Expenses

Increased **cost per click** for graduate programs from 2009-2014

Source: EAB analysis of NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment Data File 2013 and 2017; EAB interviews and analysis
Understanding the Adult Learner Mindset

What **motivates** adult learners to apply and enroll?

What **factors** do adult learners value when choosing programs?

What **prevents** interested students from applying?

Roadmap: Three Themes from EAB’s Research

*Survey of current and prospective students of graduate, bachelor’s degree completion, online, and certificate programs*

1. Adult learners require a **return on their education**.
2. Adult learners are **extremely pragmatic**.
3. Adult learners **require flexible options**.

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1) Students considering or currently enrolled in graduate programs comprised 69% of all survey respondents.

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Theme #1: Adult Learners Require a Return on Their Education

Understanding the Role of Cost Concerns

EAB SURVEY FINDINGS

Financial Factors Are Key

In Motivating Students:

61% of students named career or financial factors as their main reason for pursuing a degree or certificate

...And Deterring Them:

#1 Factor that prevents interested prospects from enrolling is cost

NAU CAMPUS PERSPECTIVE

Facing the Realities of Our Expensive Location

Cost of Living in Flagstaff Is High

17% Higher cost of living in Flagstaff than national average, with especially high housing costs

How We’ve Adapted to Address Cost Concerns

- Created accelerated master’s programs and two master’s level competency-based programs
- Adjusted assistantship stipend levels, reexamined tuition waiver allocations

Sources: EAB research and analysis, bestplaces.net/cost-of-living
Theme #2: Adult Learners Are Extremely Pragmatic

Eliminating Unnecessary Enrollment Hurdles

EAB SURVEY FINDINGS

Adult Learners Seek Convenience and Speed When Applying

- 64% of applicants and enrolled students applied to 2 or fewer schools
- 40% of participants who planned to enroll or were currently enrolled had not taken an admissions test
- 53% of students completed their application in two hours or less

NAU CAMPUS PERSPECTIVE

How We’ve Streamlined Our Admissions Processes

- Assessed All Admissions Requirements
- Condensed Application Turnaround Time

Source: EAB research and analysis
Theme #3: Adult Learners Require Flexible Options

Meeting Students’ Need for School-Life Balance

EAB SURVEY FINDINGS

Students Seek Enrollment Options that Fit with Their Busy Lifestyles

1 in 2 prospects considered online options when researching programs

45% of participants who want to enroll in the future say family and work commitments are the top reason they’re not currently pursuing a program

NAU CAMPUS PERSPECTIVE

How We’re Expanding Flexible Offerings

- Prioritizing investment in programs targeting growth
- Pivoting messaging strategy away from mountain campus experience solely
- Reconsidering the role of statewide campuses

Source: EAB research and analysis
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# A Compiled List of Factors to Assess

Creating Academic Programs That Are Competitive and Marketable

## Top Factors to Consider When Evaluating Your Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree Name</strong></td>
<td>Does degree name resonate in the market place? Do concentrations/specializations increase attractiveness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td>Admissions requirements should consider career changers as well as career enhancers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Program Structure** | • Credits  
|                    | • Courses  
|                    | • Time to Complete  
|                    | • Starts  
|                    | • Terms  
|                    | • Prerequisite(s)  
|                    | • Delivery  |
| **Tuition**       | Evaluate list price against that of competitors.                                                                                           |
| **Selectivity**   | Evaluate average test scores against those of competitors.                                                                                  |
| **Residency**     | Evaluate residency against that of competitors, consider students studying at a distance.                                                       |
## Finding the Data to Assess Your Programs

Sample Analyses for a Public University in the Midwest

### IPEDS Degree Conferrals

**Master’s in Nuclear Engineering**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Avg % Change 2013-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>-6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>-5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>-6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment**

- Red

### Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook

**Master’s in Biomedical Engineering**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Change in Job Openings 2016-2026</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Engineering Managers</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Engineers</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide Engineering Managers</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical Engineers</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment**

- Yellow

### IPEDS Online Program Growth

**Master’s in Mechanical Engineering**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Avg % Change 2013-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment**

- Green
Successful Curriculum Models Must Be Scalable

Part-Time Scheduling Accommodates Adult Learners and Financial Aid

Sample Curriculum Model

Considerations

- Does the curriculum model align to program outcomes and sequencing?
- Will the model allow for multiple entry points?
- How will faculty and instructional resources align to the model?
- Can the model be accommodated by the institution's academic calendar?
Snapshot of NAU’s Institutional Journey

From Faculty-Centered to **Student-Centered**

- Alternative credentials and badging
- Online delivery, flexible starts
- Application review processes
- Challenging aging disciplinary paradigms
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Adult Learner
Program Planning Diagnostic

Does Your Program Design Support Graduate and Online Enrollment Growth?
Conclusion and Q&A

Key Takeaways

1. Be **student-centric** in program structure and design

2. Ensure decisions are informed by your **market and competitors**

3. **Align resources with demand** to optimize for growth