



*Pierpont partners with Blackboard to drive student engagement*

## Improving the re-enrollment rate through proactive outreach.

The mission of Pierpont Community & Technical College is “to provide opportunities for learning, training, and further education that enrich the lives of individuals and promote the economic growth” of the thirteen-county region in West Virginia that Pierpont serves. Many of its students are nontraditional, juggling family and work responsibilities while seeking to improve themselves through education.

### Getting a handle on student stop outs

Stop outs – students who decline to re-enroll for the next term – are a common problem for community colleges. This was troublesome to Ron Weist, Pierpont’s Director of Enrollment Research and Planning, who knew that his students were motivated and had a strong interest and desire to complete what they started. “We recognize that each of the students who comes here has a goal, that they want to accomplish something. They want to get a job, or get a better job, or improve the quality of life for their family. Whether they’re enrolled or not, our students still have those goals. We wanted to find a way to not just figure out why they left, but to find a way to make it possible for them to return.”

Weist had anecdotal information on why students were not returning, but he needed to roll out a more formal study – one that would help identify patterns and provide him with actionable information. However, launching a survey of this nature would be time intensive, and Ron’s team did not have the resources to execute.

### Replacing the anecdotal with actionable data

To conduct the survey of nonreturning students, Pierpont enlisted the help of Blackboard. Blackboard conducted a phone survey to 2,900 Pierpont students who had begun taking courses, but who had declined to re-enroll for the following term.

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## Quick Summary



**Problem:** Stop outs - students who decline to re-enroll



**Goal:** Re-enrollment of inactive students



**Campaign:** 9,700 calls placed to 2,900 students over a two-week period



**Results:** Crucial data on non-matriculating students AND a 23% increase in re-enrollments

For Weist, it was important to be intentional in how they framed the campaign. Yes, he wanted to understand the root causes underlying a student's decision to leave, but he also wanted the students contacted to know that Pierpont still wanted to help them achieve their educational goals. "We explicitly ask students if there was a way we could work together to help them achieve that. We were delighted that so many of them said 'yes.'"

### **Growing the re-enrollment rate by 23%, and putting processes in place to keep students enrolled**

The campaign results showed that one of the largest barriers to re-enrollment was accessible support. Pierpont provided 9-5 support, but these hours did not meet the needs of their non-traditional student body – many of whom were working 9-5 and required a more expansive model to accommodate their needs.

**"One piece of data that struck me from the campaign was that the call center was four times more likely to reach a person outside of their standard calling hours than within them. That's our student body!"** says Weist.

As a result of the survey, Pierpont is addressing their operational hours. "We recognize that we need to be accessible and available to our students when they need us, and not just when we happen to be available." To this end, Pierpont immediately brought on an enrollment counselor to work evening hours and is using their refined knowledge about their students to rebuild their business model – recruitment efforts, retention initiatives, student support – around the need for nontraditional hours for non-traditional students. **"Before we did the survey, we didn't have the hard data,"** says Weist. **"It's easy to dismiss the need for non-traditional support hours, but you can't refute the data."**

The outreach campaign and Pierpont's philosophical and operational shift are yielding impressive results. In a typical semester, Pierpont had re-admitted about 125 students. For the semester following the Blackboard campaign, the re-admittance number is up to 154, an increase of 23 percent. This number far exceeds the net of five students that would have been required to break even on the campaign.

As a result, Pierpont is deploying additional campaigns with Blackboard including one targeting currently enrolled students whose payment balance is putting their enrollment in jeopardy.

Working with the Blackboard team was an enjoyable experience for Pierpont. “The Blackboard staff was professional, knowledgeable, and approachable. They really served us as experts in guiding what we were trying to accomplish. We knew our goal, but we didn’t know all the ways we could get there. The Blackboard folks did and made sure that we got the maximum benefit from the partnership,” says Weist.

### **Blackboard Student Lifecycle Engagement Campaigns**

Blackboard offers a range of services that help colleges and universities recruit, enroll, support, and retain their students. Student Lifecycle Engagement Campaigns is a set of targeted, quickly implemented student contacts that result in high ROI. Designed to move students through university processes to improve student experience and university performance, these contacts make students feel more connected to the institution. Consistent outreach enables institutions to focus on areas of opportunity, such as increasing student enrollment and retention. Feedback from the campaigns provides just-in-time data that enables an institution to quickly align its resources to respond to an opportunity or problem area.

**“Our Administration said this campaign was the best money we spent all year. We only need to re-admit 5 students to get an ROI and we did more than 5 times that. In my opinion, the work was worth it for data on non-matriculating students even without the re-admitted students. Getting students back was a PLUS.”**

**Ron Weist**  
**Director of Enrollment**  
**Research and Planning**  
**Pierpont Community &**  
**Technical College**

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