

Westminster College

When Westminster College needed to communicate with prospective students, they turned to Blackboard ConnectTxt to facilitate cost-effective, one-on-one messaging. According to Dana Simmons, the college's director of e-marketing and outreach, "Incorporating ConnectTxt into our recruitment strategy has been so exciting because it allows us to communicate with students in a way that they can communicate back, in a timely fashion using the method they prefer."

CHALLENGE

Founded in 1875, Westminster College is a private liberal arts college in Salt Lake City. The college offers more than 70 academic programs and serves 2,500 undergraduate and 800 graduate students. The student to faculty ratio is 11:1, and the college is well known for a commitment to actively engaging students in the learning process.

Communicating effectively—and efficiently—with potential students is a perpetual challenge for higher education institutions. For Westminster College, a growing student preference for text messaging meant that email and voice messages for the institution's recruitment efforts weren't generating the desired response rates. According to Dana Simmons, the college's director of e-marketing and outreach, "Communication has changed. While email, phone calls and direct mail are still viable tools, effectively connecting with students today means having a mobile conversation."

With yields down, the ability to connect personally with individual students proved to be especially relevant for the admissions department. "Students aren't deciding where they want to go until the last minute. They are really weighing all their choices. Being able to create that one-on-one connection with students—and develop a dialogue, not just a one-way communication push—is critical to increasing our yield."

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Private liberal arts college located in Salt Lake City, Utah
- ▶ 2,500 undergraduate and 800 graduate students
- ▶ Relies on ConnectTxt to enhance recruiting efforts
- ▶ Experienced significant increases in response rates, ranging from 24 percent to 61 percent
- ▶ Uncovered data, including non-enrollee college choices, that was previously unknown

SOLUTION

To enhance their ability to connect with prospective students, Westminster College turned to the Blackboard ConnectTxt service. According to Simmons, "Incorporating ConnectTxt into our recruitment strategy has been so exciting because it allows us to communicate with students in a way that they can communicate back, in a timely fashion using the method they prefer." The system's easy-to-use interface facilitated a quick adoption by administrators and staff, key to ensuring a consistent return on investment. "ConnectTxt is really simple and easy to manage. You don't have to be a techie to use it."

RESULTS

Westminster College now relies on ConnectTxt to reach prospective students with a variety of messages, from upcoming high school visit notifications to incomplete application reminders. Results have been positive, and a recent message delivered to prospective students with incomplete applications yielded an exciting—and unexpected—response rate. "We had a pool of applicants who hadn't finished their applications, and we couldn't get them to respond via phone or email," said Simmons. "We sent out 800 texts that asked if they were going to complete the application. Students had the option of replying 'yes,' 'no,' or 'maybe.' Right away, we heard from a total of 48% of the target audience. 37% of those respondents said 'yes.' That was huge! Another 15 percent followed up with 'maybe' and requested more information."

The college also sent messages via ConnectTxt to remind students of an upcoming enrollment confirmation deadline. "We wanted to know which students were going to deposit and enroll," said Simmons. "We instantly had 24 percent of these students responding via texts. It was fantastic. We were then able to focus our recruiters' efforts on the appropriate influential audience. This gave us significant savings in both time and effort."

Follow-up texts asked students who declined where they would be attending. "Part of our business lies in determining our competition. Students who were not enrolling received an auto-responder message wishing them good luck and inquiring about their chosen school. Sixty-one percent replied and told us where they were going. This was critical, real-time data that we were able to gather via the simple act of texting."

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Director of e-Marketing and Outreach
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Blackboard ConnectTxt has also played a key role in driving event attendance. After seeing that Utah attendance at their Admitted Student Day event was down, Westminster decided to host a last minute barbecue as a response strategy. "Using ConnectTxt, I was able to communicate with students and invite them to the barbecue," said Simmons. "We were able to get 47 kids on campus here in only ten days and 20% of those that came had responded yes via text that they were going to come. More importantly, there were students who were undecided, and we were able to ask them again the day before the event if they would be attending. For those who said 'no,' I was thrilled that they actually took the time to communicate with us. Students are willing to respond if you connect with them in the right way."

The ability to reach one student or thousands with a simple text message has become a key element in promoting the college's brand. With ConnectTxt, Westminster College is no longer reliant solely on ads or direct mail campaigns to develop brand awareness. "We're now creating brand exposure via texting," said Simmons. "The barbecue invitation is the perfect example. We didn't need to create an expensive ad or a direct mail piece to connect with prospective students."

