

Recruitment, Admissions and Technology: A View from University of Manitoba

John (Jay) Doering
Past-President, Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS)
Vice-Provost & Dean, Graduate
University of Manitoba

Introduction

Some of us remember seeing posters on bulletin boards advertising graduate studies at the University of 'X'. The effective posters were eye catching – a happy graduate student in an academic setting or an iconic building at University 'X.' There was an address on the posters that one could write to request an application package. Oh, how times have changed. Recruitment posters on bulletin boards are extinct and paper applications are now few and far between.

Using Technology to Enhance Recruitment and Admissions

The Internet has become the tool to attract and recruit students. Students troll the net comparing graduate programs, university laurels, and funding packages. Professors are frequently inundated with emails from prospective graduate students. Effective recruitment webpages need to be attractive, user friendly, and Google metrics driven: the most frequently sought information (such as the graduate programs available, funding, admission requirements, and how to apply, etc.) should be no more than a click or two away. Web pages need to be compatible with a variety of operating systems and browsers.

There are a lot of (not-for-profit and for-profit) websites that attempt to draw together information on graduate programs at different universities. Such Canadian websites include aucc.ca and canadian-universities.net. These websites then direct students to the relevant university's graduate program webpages. It is possible to determine which sites are effective in directing students to the university's graduate webpages.

The University of Manitoba uses Hobsons software to enhance the graduate student experience associated with recruitment and admissions. We currently have two admissions/recruitment related modules: ApplyYourself[®] and Connect[®] CRM (Client Relations Manager). Although we had a paperless admissions system prior to installing Hobsons ApplyYourself[®] and Connect[®] CRM, these two software packages have been game changers for enhancing the application and recruitment experience.

ApplyYourself[®] allows prospective students to upload their required documents thereby facilitating provisional admission in a timely manner. Prospective students can track all aspects of their application online. Have reference letters been received? Is their application complete? Has the department reviewed their application? Has an admission decision been made? When a prospective student completes an application in ApplyYourself[®] that application is immediately available for consideration by the relevant department, allowing for quick admission decisions. The system reminds and encourages prospective students with incomplete applications to finish their application. ApplyYourself[®] and Connect[®] CRM provide a seamless application experience.

Connect[®] CRM provides the functionality to develop a specific communication strategy/plan for each graduate program at the University of Manitoba. Communication plans can be used to track specific advertising initiatives or events and the media used to communicate them. Automated communication can take the form of SMS texts (within Canada and the US),

letters, emails, webpages, or RSS feeds. With Connect[®] CRM it is easy to stay “engaged” with a student from the moment s/he first lands on the University’s homepage until the day they register and beyond. Student relationships can be built with personalized portal pages and customized communications, some triggered automatically based on particular behaviors (such as clicking a link). Connect[®] CRM also provides multiple levels of data analysis – from tracking the source of each student record to creating visual reports that compare values to exporting data for complex analysis. Within Connect[®] CRM we also have the Hobsons Events module. This is a complete event planner that facilitates the ability to create events, manage registration, waitlists, and communication with registrants. This module can facilitate events such as orientation and workshops.

Which social media or web tools are the most effective?

It is difficult to say with certainty which social media or web-based tools are most effective in attracting students to the University of Manitoba. Our faculty of graduate studies webpages receive hundreds of thousands of views per month. The challenge is to drive prospective students to the faculty of graduate studies homepage from other sites. We will be experimenting with various for-profit websites this year to determine which site(s) are most effective at driving prospective students to the Faculty of Graduate Studies homepage. By normalizing the cost of advertising on various sites by the number of prospective students that complete an application and/or are admitted, it will be possible to determine the cost effectiveness of various site(s).

We have more than 2,100 “Likes” on Facebook, whereas about 9% of graduate students follow us on Twitter. We are in the process of setting up a tumblr account for photo and text blogs.

Improving the Review of Student Applications

We are in the process of assessing Hobsons AppReview[®] software, which is a web-based interface for reviewing applications completed through ApplyYourself[®]. AppReview[®] facilitates viewing applications from anywhere (with internet) and is mobile-device friendly. The interface in AppReview[®] allows reviewers or decision makers to create a customizable ‘inbox’ that displays only the information the user wants to see. There is no need to scroll through each individual application file. Instead the user creates a ‘dashboard’ of the relevant information, with more in-depth information only a click away. All of this serves to significantly streamline the processing of applications between graduate units and the faculty of graduate studies.

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