Transferring with Ease: Optimizing the Transfer Process for Students at Park University

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Executive Summary

To grow transfer student rates and retain students, Park University should overhaul its online design, outreach, and advisory strategy. Providing accessible information would draw in prospective transfer students, as well as provide 24/7 access to important contact addresses and enrollment requirements. Overhauling the advisory team strategy will set students up for success in their courses as well as encourage confidence in the abilities of the university. I am confident that implementing these new strategies will boost enrollment of transfer students to Park University.

To ensure growth in enrollment rates, I recommend the following:
- Park University should reconfigure their online presence to be more accessible.
- Add clearly defined lists of requirements for enrollment.
- Advertise orientation events geared towards transfer students.
- Implement course evaluation programs into the website, as seen similarly at University of Missouri - Kansas City (UMKC).

Park University should overhaul their current fronting enrollment advisory program.
- Retrain enrollment advisors on necessary courses for degrees.
- Hire more staff for the Student Success Department to mitigate mistakes caused by overwhelming caseloads.
- Have regular meetings between advisors and department heads to ensure there is no confusion on degree requirements.

After one year Park University should conduct a survey over the results from the implementation of these methods.

Introduction

To avoid further drops in transfer enrollment rates, Park University has contacted me to evaluate what changes need to be made to ensure growth.

Purpose and Scope

Park University is a well-known and highly regarded collegiate-level educational institution, with its flagship office located in Parkville, Missouri. When prospective students look into transferring to Park University the available information is lacking and hard to locate. The purpose is to decide whether or not Park University should overhaul their online presence for accessibility and retrain the advisory team on detailed degree

requirements. This report will cover several topics regarding Park University including enrollment rates, advisory procedures, and online presence and accessibility.

Assumptions

The recommendations made are based on the assumption that Park University wants to grow its enrollment of transfer students. I am assuming that Park University will hold the same estimated amount of majors and programs at the time this program is in place, and that no extenuating circumstances will apply (e.g. pandemic, natural disaster, war, loss of campus operations).

Methods

The information in this report comes from online sources and reference statistics. The statistics used that are specific to Park University were made available to the public online. The majority of the research comes from Stephanie Easterday's thesis regarding the advisement needs of college students.

Definitions

There is a term found throughout the report that I would like to explain beforehand. The term is "Student Success Coach," which is used to describe the first level of advisory available at Park University. These are the advisors that will be discussed in this report.

Criteria

I have established criteria that needs to be favorable for enrollment to grow at Park University. They are ranked by importance and percentage below.

- Previous enrollment statistics – 20%
- Online accessibility – 40%
- Advisory procedural overhaul – 40%

I will examine each criterion separately and give a favorable or not favorable recommendation. Advisory procedural overhaul and online accessibility are weighted the heaviest, therefore requiring at the minimum a somewhat favorable recommendation. There must be at least a 70% total favorable recommendation to receive a positive recommendation overall.

Park University Enrollment

Park University's enrollment statistics are published online annually following the completion of the academic year. These statistics provide information regarding types of students, program enrollment, and retention rates.

Student Demographics

Park University reported 7,762 students in the 2021-2022 academic year and 6,634 students in the 2022-2023 school year (Park University Fast Facts, 2023). This one statistic demonstrates a decrease in enrollment as a whole. It was found that in 2023, only 2,695 students were enrolled full-time in undergraduate programs. This breaks down to roughly 50.1% of the undergraduate population (Park University Fast Facts, 2023).

Program Enrollment and Faculty

Park University reported 60,155 undergraduate credit hours taken in the 2022-2023 academic school year with the most enrolled disciplines being Business Management, English, Natural and Physical Science, and Psychology. The university offers 58 undergraduate major programs and 29 certificate programs. It's noted that there are 104 full-time professors, 600+ adjunct, and 64% of full-time faculty who are tenured or are tenure-track. Lastly, 79% of full-time faculty have a doctorate or other terminal degree (Park University Fast Facts, 2023).

Retention Rates

The university reports a retention rate of 57% for first-time full-time students and 36% for first-time part-time students. It also notes that 24% of these students will go on to graduate from the university with 37% of students eventually transferring out of the college.
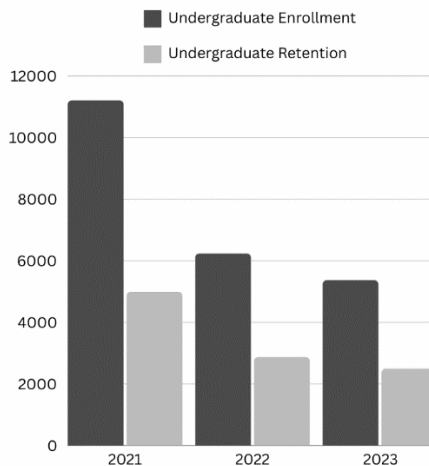

Figure 1: Enrollment and Retention Rate Comparison
(Source: Park University, 2021-2023)

Student Satisfaction

According to reviews left by students among several different websites, the average satisfaction of students at Park University sits at 3/5. Student complaints range from "It was always impossible to get ahold of every advisor I ever had," to "Attending Park University was a horrible experience!" (Park University Reviews, n.d.). While there are good reviews such as "Park is an excellent, small college," and "I love Park University," many were left before 2018 (Park University Reviews, n.d.). These reviews regarding student satisfaction follow the same trends as enrollment rates – downwards.

Online Accessibility

In the modern age of online access at the touch of a button, Park University's online presence needs an upgrade. The following items should be addressed regarding the optimization of the official university webpage.

Enrollment-Active Pages

Enrollment-active pages is an umbrella term for sections that "most directly impact enrollment outcomes" (EAB, n.d.). These pages can cover topics like tuition costs, academic disciplines, admissions procedures, and campus visits. These sections should be the most developed with easy-to-read material and detailed links. Appearing currently on the Park University web page are links to these enrollment-active pages without much detail or guiding content.

Common Deterrents

There are several reasons that prospective students may click off of the university website, also known as deterrents. Finalsite.com conducted a survey with over 1,500 education institutions, and created a list of the commonalities between low-performing pages. These can include "confusing navigation, outdated content, and overwhelming graphics" (Top Website Homepage Optimization Tips for College and Universities, n.d.). All three of these are present within Park University's current website design which can detract possible transfer students.

Credit Evaluation Implementation

As of the writing of this report, Park University does not currently offer credit evaluation services on their webpage. One of these well-known services is Transferology, a service offered by competing colleges such as UMKC. This resource allows transfer students to see where their currently earned credits will measure on their prospective university's evaluation level, giving them an idea of how many more credits they will have to take until they receive their degree.

Advisory Procedural Overhaul

When it comes to the make-up of the advisors, also known as "Student Success Coaches," there are some gaps that need to be filled. Below are the major issues present in the current system.

Student Success Coaches

Student Success Coaches are the first available resource for students looking to enroll in their courses. Once admitted to the university, students are assigned a Student Success Coach based upon their major or program of study. There are on average 6 Student Success Coaches available each academic year. These 6 advisors are currently expected to be knowledgeable and capable of enrolling students in courses that fulfill the requirements of their degrees. With over 58 major programs available to students, this is an insurmountable amount of information that coaches are expected to know.

Availability

Student Success Coaches currently hold too many cases to be able to know and understand the needs of the students they advise. In an academic study conducted by Stephanie Easterday titled "Academic advising: A study of the impact of academic advising on student satisfaction," it was found that "students who are satisfied are more likely to continue their education and therefore be retained by the university" (Easterday, 2013). It's also noted within the study that "students reported being most satisfied in the areas of level of ease when speaking with their advisors, their advisors knowledge of general education and university requirements, and their advisor's availability when the student needed assistance" (Easterday, 2013).

Credit Evaluation

Transfer students in particular need an advisor to evaluate their earned credits and figure out what classes they still need in order to adhere to university requirements. When there is little access to advisors, and then advisors are unknowledgeable or enroll students in incorrect classes, transfer students can be put off from enrolling in the university. For Park University to continue to attract transfer students as well as encourage the growth of their enrollment rates, changes must be made within the advisory system that is currently presented within the Student Success Coach framework.

Conclusions and Recommendations

All of the research presented supports the decision to revamp the current online presence of Park University as well as procedural changes of the advisory systems in place. The online accessibility as well as advisory procedural changes criteria received favorable recommendations for a total of 80%. Together, policy overhauls have earned 80% based on the listed criteria. Therefore, I believe that Park University could see extensive growth in enrollment rates of transfer students. Optimizing the webpage for the

university as well as overhauling the current advisory system will allow for growth and accessibility to university information. To ensure enrollment growth, I recommend the following:

- Park University should reconfigure their online presence to be more accessible.
- Add clearly defined lists of requirements for enrollment.
- Advertise orientation events geared towards transfer students.
- Implement course evaluation programs into the website, as seen similarly at UMKC.
- Park University should overhaul their current fronting enrollment advisory program.
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- Hire more staff for the Student Success Department to mitigate mistakes caused by overwhelming caseloads.
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After one year, Park University should conduct a survey over the results shown by the implementation of these methods.

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