



## Introduction

In 2013, Maguire Associates was retained by Evergreen to provide the College with a fresh look at its current marketing, enrollment and financial aid strategies and resources and help develop strategies to support the College's enrollment goals. To inform these efforts, two separate, but related, studies were conducted:

- **A Pricing and Aid Study** - To provide Evergreen with analysis and recommendations to develop tuition and financial aid policies and to set and achieve goals for net tuition and enrollment levels.
- **A Student Recruitment and Communications Study** - To provide Evergreen with analysis and recommendations to guide student recruitment and marketing efforts.

## Methodology

Our assessment and recommendations are based on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered and reviewed during summer and fall 2013. This includes:

- Extensive on-campus interviews with Evergreen administrators, staff, faculty, and students;
- Review of Evergreen collateral as well as that of five 'comparative' institutions;
- Interviews conducted with parents of admitted students;
- Survey research with students who had inquired with Evergreen and those who had applied and been admitted to Evergreen; and
- Modeling of institutional data related to price, aid and yield.

This document summarizes Maguire Associates' recommendations for the ten initiatives that we believe should be top priority for the College. These are based on all the information that has emerged in the course of the project. Comprehensive summary of the methodologies and results from the different components of the studies will be included with the report.

## 10 Key Initiatives

Following are ten key initiatives for Evergreen that have emerged from this project. Some of these are already being discussed and/or implemented on campus, while others will require more significant planning and/or investment of resources before implementation. Note that these are listed in no particular order.

### **Key Initiative 1 – Increase student search in order to grow inquiries and applications.**

While Evergreen purchases some student prospect names, we recommend Evergreen consider expanding student search initiatives and track successes from different sources. This includes experimenting with sophomore Student Search in order to capture the interests of students earlier on in their college selection process.



## **Key Initiative 2 – Improve response to inquirers' request for information.**

When a student or parent inquires and requests additional information, the College's response should be swift and personalized and be the start of a series of strategic messages and communications. Our secret inquirer exercise revealed gaps in Evergreen's responsiveness to an expression of interest from a (hypothetical) potential student.

## **Key Initiative 3 – Develop a compelling message system that is prescriptive, emotional and motivating.**

You've done some good work focusing on messages about key attributes and promises. However, there does not appear to be unified and disciplined core messaging across the institution that holistically and succinctly represents the Evergreen experience. Some areas to focus on with the College's messaging and communications include:

- *Convey how Evergreen's non-traditional teaching leads to a successful post-college life.* Provide more evidence of outcomes of an Evergreen education. Add to perceptions of value or return on investment by educating students and their families about how Evergreen degrees translate into careers. Stories about successful Evergreen alumni will also help form student and parent images about Evergreen's quality, reputation and outcomes.
- *Provide proof of the quality of an Evergreen education in order to address (mis)perceptions.* The concept of academic challenge at Evergreen seems understood and verified by those on campus and by inquirers who are inclined to apply. Others may need this more clearly articulated, as some may assume that no grades means no tests (which isn't the case) and no challenge. The deeper way in which Evergreen students experience academic challenge and the high expectations faculty have for scholarship deserve to be conveyed, and can often be best conveyed through a student voice.
- *Minimize references to "no grades" in initial communications to prospective students.* Again, the data suggests that some inquirers are not convinced that there is a high level of academic challenge or rigor at Evergreen. To the extent that this impression may be drawn from the fact that Evergreen has narrative evaluations instead of grades and doesn't offer majors or minors, those references should be suppressed early on in the introduction of students to the College. As they become more familiar with the educational philosophy, those pedagogic practices will make more sense to them, but they should not be used as convenient reasons to eliminate Evergreen for further investigation.
- *Communicate to students that they can pursue their areas of interest (major) at Evergreen.* While the College does not technically have majors, the research confirmed that availability of a major that is of interest to them is a top priority for the College's prospective students. It is important that you continue to develop and communicate pathways for students to pursue their areas of interest (major) at Evergreen.
- *Talk about "value" as opposed to highlighting "affordability."* In talking about "value," emphasize the concept of net cost from the outset as well as students' ability to complete their college education in four years.
- *Highlight Evergreen's close knit community and its benefits to your students.* Evergreen's prospective students greatly value the College's smaller class sizes, environment that enhances differences and creates an exchange of ideas, and opportunity to work closely with faculty to review learning.



#### **Key Initiative 4 - Experiment with more targeted communications and content.**

Continue to target materials to the College's key subgroups. You have done some good work here in your printed marketing materials. Your transfer and parent brochures are good steps in the right direction. However, emails also should be customized and targeted more to your audiences. At a minimum, this will require an email tool other than Outlook and a more sophisticated tool for data management, audience segmentation and analysis.

#### **Key Initiative 5 - Implement a system to upload data directly from the on-line application to Banner.**

Evergreen's on-line application was launched in August 2002, yet automation of uploading data from it directly into Banner has not been achieved. As a result, dedicated staff are needed to hand enter data, which is not only inefficient, but introduces error. Having an automated system where web-based inquiry data can be tied directly into Banner will improve prospective student data quality and allow Evergreen to redeploy resources elsewhere.

#### **Key Initiative 6 – Use data and analytics more consistently to inform strategy and tactics.**

Explore how Banner might be more fully implemented to fill the need for a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) solution. This will likely require providing greater access and more training for Admissions staff to enable them to enter data, access lists, and run reports. The focus needs to be as much on the outcomes as on the process. The end result will be improved effectiveness in their travel and recruitment event and marketing/communications planning.

#### **Key Initiative 7 – Continue to update and make investments in your website and social media.**

The research confirms that Internet searches are among the top ways Evergreen's prospective students learn about the College. As such, it is critical that Evergreen continually updates the College's website and social media. This includes making the look and feel of your website engaging and consistent with that of your print materials as well as striving to include more video content.

#### **Key Initiative 8 – Tread carefully on implementing a financial aid leveraging strategy.**

The largest opportunity for leveraging financial aid for increasing enrollment and revenue is among the out-of-state population, given that non-resident tuition is much higher than resident tuition and many out-of-state first-year students have private liberal arts colleges in their consideration set. However, the financial aid leveraging model revealed a low level of price sensitivity that is consistent with highly selective institutions and/or specialty institutions that attract a highly self-selective population. Our analysis shows that increasing the number of applicants to Evergreen may have at least as much, if not more, of an impact on enrollment and net revenue as increasing the discount rate.

#### **Key Initiative 9 – Continue to be cautious with your tuition increases.**

Over the last 20 years, Evergreen's in-state tuition has tracked closely with Western Washington and lower than both the University of Washington-Seattle and Washington State. Given that the College does not currently share the same level of visibility (and prestige?) as these other in-state four year public universities, pursuing a strategy of adopting larger-than-typical tuition increases to gain more revenue is likely to backfire through reduced enrollment yields, particularly among the transfer population.



**Key Initiative 10 - Simplify the foundation-sponsored scholarship process.**

Evergreen has over two dozen foundation-sponsored scholarships, and the current process of making students complete separate applications for nearly all scholarships is burdensome to students and creates administrative complexity. Moving to a single, “Common App”-style application process, where the applicant completes just one form, would be a very welcome move among scholarship seekers.