El Camino College Recommendations Summary

Summary

Interact Communications submits this summary of findings to El Camino College and Compton Center after an extensive review of the student intake process. These recommendations are made after collecting registration and enrollment data, spoofing the admissions process via web and phone, and conducting several in-person interviews with El Camino and Compton Center students, faculty, staff, and administrators. While additional recommendations were made in previously submitted documents, these are the changes that Interact believes are most vital to improving the intake process for students and staff.

Recommendations

1. Track the Herd

In analyzing the data and talking to staff, it is evident that tracking students between "watering holes" is not being done. There are counts at each of the stops (application, counseling, assessment, registration, etc.), but there is no way to look at those numbers comprehensively. How long does it take students to complete the process? Where do students tend to get delayed? Is there a critical threshold at which students drop out of the pipeline for good? These are all questions that can help shape future changes to the intake process.

The electronic tools currently used by the colleges may temporarily be able to handle this with some tweaks or upgrades. Interact recommends implementing a campus-wide tool that can create comprehensive reports about student movement as soon as feasibly possible. In the interim, it may make sense to allow student services departments to implement their own software until a larger one can be found.

Next Step: Put real-time, day-to-day tracking in place for student volume and flow.

2. Focus on the Human Touch

Whether students are trying to weave their way through the phone tree, submit paperwork, or create a MyPlan during a 30-minute counseling session, the human touch is largely lost in the intake pipeline, and the student experience is nowhere to be found.

To combat this, Interact recommends reorganizing the registration process by moving orientation to immediately after application. In addition to moving this step, we recommend that you revamp it, as well. Include students in both the in-person and online orientation. Have students present as much information as possible, include "ECC/Compton Center Hacks," wherein students can give real perspectives and tips, provide information on student life and have clubs reps in attendance. This is a chance to show your applicants how fun you are!

Consider finding ways to lengthen the initial counseling appointments. The 30-minute sessions are barely long enough to complete a MyPlan and leave no time to discuss any other personal or educational topics. If the students know that even one person on campus cares about them, they are more likely to complete the process through registration.

Finally, the confusing and endless phone tree needs a complete overhaul. Prospective students should not have to go through several prompts, voicemails, or transfers to talk to a real

person. Departments should not be regularly receiving calls that are not related to their area. Consider a standardized phone protocol and increasing the "switchboard" staff at both ECC and Compton Center.

Next Step: Explore ways to infuse personal relationships in the intake process, beyond outreach and the counselors.

3. Cut Back on Paper

Students and staff are being overwhelmed with paper. Departments are collecting paper verifications, scanning them, and then passing along the paper because the scanning software isn't useful for their needs. Students are forced to come to campus several times to submit papers in order to complete the intake process or clear account holds. Letters are still being mailed to home addresses.

Utilizing technology will not only save students and staff a lot of time, it may also save a lot of money in supplies and mailing. Launch an opt-out texting tool that allows for emergency notifications, account changes, scheduling updates, and marketing messages to be texted to students. This is an extremely cost-effective way for a department to instantly reach thousands of students.

Interact also recommends purchasing software that allows students to submit necessary documents and verification via email or their phone. This will keep the lines shorter during peak times, is less labor-intensive than reviewing hundreds (thousands?) of documents each semester, and will save the student trips to campus.

Next Step: Find an interim paper solution for immediate student/staff relief.

4. Market at the Student Level

Whether it comes from the marketing department, registration, counseling, or outreach, all student materials need to be written at an appropriate reading level and should be as visual and brief as possible. If students are not getting the message, it's time to change the message. Consider using infographics, bullet points, real student quotes, etc. in materials. Students are not going to read through pages of legal-speak. Materials can be written by adults with advanced degrees, but they shouldn't sound like it. This is a vital step in keeping people in the pipeline, especially with so many ESL and basic skills students.

Next Step: Review and enhance ALL internal student-facing communications.

5. Help Students Find Their Path

The "Ed Plan" is used to help memorialize student choices and to map out a path for the student, in terms of programs and classes. However, students frequently arrive at community colleges with no clear path and no clear idea of their options. A meeting with a counselor to choose classes is too late for this kind of exploration, as counselors are focused on student registration. El Camino lays out these choices for the student, but has little time to help the student find their path and navigate the system. If the college were to offer tools to help the student find their way to their career or next college, this would be a powerful recruiting tool and would provide students with both motivation and momentum – two key factors that impact retention and success.

Next Step: Explore the idea of infusing the "Pathways" concept into the initial student experience.