Marquette University
How our yield increased
through a counterintuitive decline in applications

For Marquette University, freshman enrollment increased for fall 2016 despite a 39 percent decrease in submitted applications. The difference? A stronger applicant pool. Marquette achieved a major boost by searching for the right students thanks to a shift in campus culture and data-driven strategies that targeted students who were *more likely to enroll*—not just fill out another application.

In her first year as interim dean of admissions at this four-year private institution, Jean Burke saw the need for a change in student search and application generation. While Marquette's application numbers had increased over the years through its search program, yield was not increasing. The university desired to reach more of the right applicants—those who would proceed to enroll after applying.

> " We knew it was a risk, but I felt it was a calculated risk."
>
> JEAN BURKE
> INTERIM DEAN OF ADMISSIONS

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

BE THE DIFFERENCE.

Results from Marquette University's use of RNL predictive analytics:

163-student increase in freshmen, from 1,818 in 2015 to 1,981 in 2016.

39% Decrease in applications submitted

39 percent decrease in applications submitted, from 23,302 to 14,257.

## Better qualified pool of applicants a key to enrollment gain

The quest to build a more qualified applicant pool and a more focused search program came with a challenge: Could the university trust the analytics from Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) which showed, counterintuitively, that yield would increase with a decrease in the *number* of applications?

To conduct a more intentional search based on using analytics to reach a more specific audience, the university's leaders took a leap of faith. Why? Because getting more of the right applications was the goal—not getting more applications overall. Also, the staff realized that having a smaller search pool would make it possible to spend more time and resources on students who were more likely to enroll.

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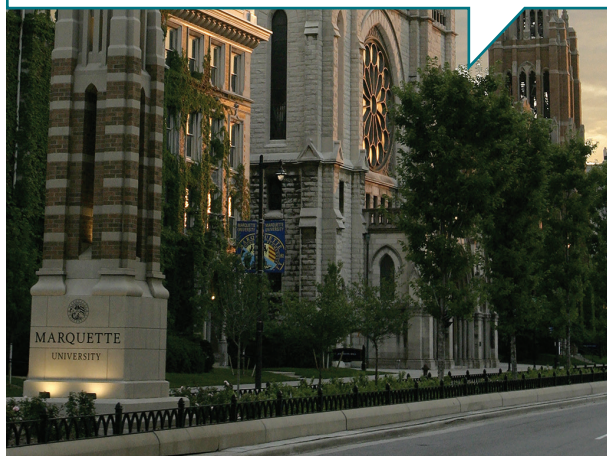
"Our staff was so excited to hear that we were going to make this change," Burke said. "It was a risk, but I felt that it was a calculated risk."

To set the wheels in motion, Burke built a team to work with Ruffalo Noel Levitz to implement the new strategy.

The communications flow was revamped in order to send appropriate messages to the right prospective students while effectively capturing the look and feel of Marquette. Throughout the year, transparent communication between the campus team and other leaders kept the project on track in a supportive manner. This involved difficult discussions with the provost—Daniel Meyers—that were ultimately met with patience and understanding.

"Each quarter as we'd meet with the board of trustees, we'd do the enrollment report. Fall was a little nerve-wracking, but to his [Meyers'] credit, he was very supportive, even though I think he still had some reservations," Burke said. "When he presented to the board, he always showed complete confidence that we were going to do what we said we were going to do."

As the May 1 National Candidates Reply Date approached, the team became more confident in reaching its goal of 1,935 freshman deposits.

"I was just thrilled on May 1," Burke said of reaching well over 2,000 deposits. "It was great to see our expectations come to fruition."

Marquette attributes its rapid success to three main initiatives launched in 2015:

- Increasing use of RNL's analytics and communications support;
- Implementing a new CRM, which supported the new approach; and
- Increasing financial aid to support enrollment in the less predictive inaugural year.

Aligning these three tactics allowed Marquette to take a comprehensive approach to generating deposits.

Notable outcomes

Marquette exceeded its goals for enrollment despite having fewer applicants than the previous year. Over the course of one year, the university was able to achieve the following:

- 163-student increase in freshmen (from 1,818 in 2015 to 1,981 in 2016), despite a 39 percent decrease in applications submitted (from 23,302 to 14,257);
- A dramatic increase in the proportion of applicants who committed to Marquette for fall 2016; and
- Quality and characteristics of the enrolled freshman class were maintained.

While Marquette's enrollment goals are always set with historical data in mind, new goals going forward will consider the capacity of programs without adding additional resources, as three of the university's seven colleges hit their maximum enrollment limit in fall 2016. The university also plans to continue its current focus on generating more qualified applicants using predictive modeling and analytics.

> " The results exceeded our expectations. Not only did we meet our goal, we exceeded it. "

Read more comments from Jean Burke at Marquette University

"One of the great things with working with the Ruffalo Noel Levitz team is that we had ongoing conversation. In late fall, I sat down and told my boss about the [decreased application] numbers. He said, 'That's probably the only time Jean's going to see that look on my face.' I had two folks from RNL come and present all the history on why we've done this. It's one thing for him to hear that from me—I wanted him to also hear it from a different perspective. They were wonderful and ran through all that explanation, and he began to understand what we were trying to do here."

"There's that time between qualification ending and summer where you just kind of hold your breath some days. I knew it was going to be scary to a degree, but I would say that the results exceeded our expectations. Not only did we meet our goal, we exceeded it."

"We want to separate ourselves. We want to stand out. We don't want to look like everybody else. Ruffalo Noel Levitz has absolutely done that for us in a big way, and we're just so appreciative of that. Our goal was to make sure that the market branding was seamless between what we sent and what they [RNL] sent. Our ongoing communication is exactly what we had hoped for. I talk to Joel [from RNL] regularly. He comes to campus, and we have meetings with my senior team."

"I have had institutions reach out to me asking, 'How did you do this? We're trying to do the same thing and we're really scared.' It is a scary decision, and in each case I tell them the story about how there was nobody to tell me no, so I did it because I thought it was the right decision. I think that the thing to do is to get leadership on board ahead of time and to make sure they understand that there's going to be a shift and a change of philosophy. Get that buy-in early on so it's not a one-person decision."

"We've had improved, more transparent communication about what's happening on our behalf, and by far a more qualified applicant pool. Hands down. The students we work with this year were to a large degree committed. Their interest in Marquette was real."

Jean Burke
Interim Dean of Admissions
Marquette University

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Learn more

Call 800.876.1117 or email **ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com** to find out how you and your team can follow the example of Marquette to build and cultivate a stronger applicant pool using **RNL Complete Enrollment**.

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