

# ATS schools find creative ways to reach students and prospects amidst pandemic

By *MARISSA DECHANT*

*In the year since the pandemic hit and changed the course of higher education, many ATS schools have pivoted to alternate modes of discourse. In doing so, schools have discovered strategies that could prove successful even in a post-pandemic future. Several administrators at ATS schools recently shared on [Engage ATS](#) what has been working for them.*

Administrators discussed their insights and said some of the new approaches have contributed to more personalized communication, user-centered design, and increases in enrollment.

## **1** *Virtual seminary sampler*

Some schools, like the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, have started to hold virtual seminary samplers to allow prospective students to attend an online class and engage with a panel of faculty and current students on key issues. For Lutheran, this has temporarily replaced its three-day sampler event where students visit campus and get a feel for the school.

“We had more participants than ever before and received very positive feedback,” said Elizabeth Chentland, who works at Lutheran as director of strategic marketing and communications.

Chentland said the school has already discovered improvements for future virtual events, including targeting more specific groups.



“While it is too early to tell if this contributed to increased enrollment in the fall, we are engaging more with prospective students that attended and are over our rate last year of applicants and early-enrollers,” she said.

Howard University School of Divinity is also hosting virtual information sessions for prospective students. Claretta McDaniel, assistant dean for student affairs at the school, said there has been an increase in attendance for the sessions.

“Prospective students and applicants have appreciated the virtual information sessions,” said McDaniel. “When we can host in-person information sessions and class visits, we will continue the virtual information sessions.”

## **2** *Enhanced hybrid technology*

Denver Seminary has focused on increasing its hybrid technology capabilities to address the

current challenge of in-person gatherings. Jason Adams, senior director of information technology at Denver, said the school has also incorporated long-term hybrid solutions.

We had a great showing of new students this spring,” Adams said. “We were already using Zoom for some online class delivery, but we enhanced a few classrooms with more permanent Zoom/iPad technology and have plans to do a few more this summer. We expect students to still want a virtual option after COVID-19 for various student services, so we plan on keeping that in mind going forward.”

### **3** *Snail mail?*

Nazarene Theological Seminary has made several enhancements during the pandemic including the creation of virtual school visits and webinar series, but one strategy may sound surprising.

“Sending out personalized information through ‘snail mail’ may seem counter intuitive, but in a highly technological

society, we are finding great engagement and success in this approach,” said Jake Edwards, the enrollment counselor at Nazarene.

Edwards said the school sends personalized communication to prospects according to their areas of interest and where they are in their journeys as potential students.

“‘Snail mail’ offers a way for us to make the recruiting process relational, approachable, and even pastoral, signaling to the student that they are more than a number in our CRM (customer relationship management),” he said.

While navigating the challenges the pandemic has presented, it is evident that schools have found success in hybrid forms of engagement. With prospective students located across the globe, it could prove beneficial for schools to implement these strategies long term.

To discuss and share insights with fellow faculty and administrators at ATS schools, visit our peer networking website, [Engage ATS](#).



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