

Enrollment management event proves “all hands on deck” approach brings success

By LISA KERN

"Innovate," "learn," "thrive," and "connect" were the themes woven into the virtual ATS event, All Hands on Deck: Creating an Enrollment Management Culture at Your Institution, held October 5–7, through synchronous Zoom sessions and asynchronous Canvas learning activities. The first ever ATS enrollment management event focused on strengthening skills, developing leadership, and connecting with others committed to growing and thriving in the areas of admissions and enrollment management.

Jo Ann Deasy, ATS director of institutional initiatives and student research, and Meghan Niskach, ATS coordinator of student personnel and questionnaires, were joined by several enrollment management personnel from ATS schools who served as the planning committee and hosted portions of the event. The planning team



Jo Ann Deasy welcomes participants to the event.



Aaron Einfeld, Calvin Theological Seminary; Daniel Grimes, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary; Adam Groza, Gateway Seminary; Claretta McDaniel, Howard University School of Divinity; Adam Poluzzi, Boston College; and Tracy Riggle Young, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The “Fellowship Hall” open discussion board space on Canvas offered the planning team and attendees a chance to introduce themselves and interact with one another even before the event began.

Poluzzi led the opening plenary—“What is Enrollment Management?”—that featured a panel conversation with Reginald Boyd Jr., of Hood Theological Seminary, and Ellen Romer Niemiec, of Catholic Theological Union. He opened the discussion by asking the panelists what the necessary skills are for being a successful enrollment manager.

“For me, it’s being a customer service representative because you are the face of the school...you have to know how to greet people and know how people will react to certain situations, certain events, certain things

you say,” said Boyd. “As I’m looking at enrollment management overall, it’s mostly about being a ‘people person’ who can just connect even if it’s the smallest connection...if you can connect with them, they will follow you all the way through whatever it is you’re asking them to do.” Niemiec added that practicing patience and good listening skills are also important for the overall work.



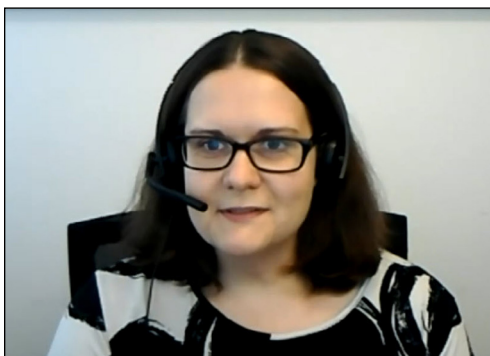
Reginald Boyd Jr. talks about the importance of connecting.

Canvas modules offered participants reading material about the history and definitions of enrollment management, details about several characteristics that describe graduate-focused enrollment management (collaborative, proactive and strategic, data-driven, and people-focused), and an interactive space to post responses on how they would define enrollment management at their institutions.

Several leaders in enrollment management at ATS schools recorded brief videos reflecting on what they feel are the central tasks for their work. Participants were asked to watch those videos housed on the event’s Canvas site, and then attend the second Zoom plenary conversation facilitated by Briceño and Einfeld to further discuss the topic. Einfeld asked Christine Henderson, of Catholic Theological Union, to reflect on challenges or successes she’s had in playing the role of an advocate for students.

“One of the things I touched on in the video was working with a lot of students who are returning to the class-

room after an extended time away, and there’s a lot of nervousness that comes along with that. So, really, it’s just constant



Christine Henderson talks about advocating for students.

encouragement and helping them figure out time management and study skills and just giving them tips to make it not so overwhelming,” said Henderson. “...it’s really just celebrating those small victories that the students can overcome and accompanying them along the way.” Participants were invited to continue the conversation in smaller break-

out groups led by Henderson and the other leaders who recorded videos.

Three skill-building workshops were designed to provide resources around several main areas of enrollment management: (1) communications, (2) connecting with student services, and (3) strategic decision making. In addition to interactive Zoom sessions using breakout groups for each workshop, articles, activities, and discussion boards were made accessible a week before the event began and remained open throughout October.

One of the aspects covered in the communications workshop was communicating culture through admissions. Poluzzi listed several recommendations for how admissions personnel can learn the culture of their institutions and communicate it to prospects:

- understand admissions as helping prospects discern "fit" with the culture of the institution,
- develop a wide network of relationships with constituents both within and outside the institution,
- practice excellent customer service,
- recognize that admissions personnel are often a prospect’s first impression of the culture of the institution,
- learn about the culture and concerns of potential applicants, and
- learn to design and create experiences for prospects that communicate culture.

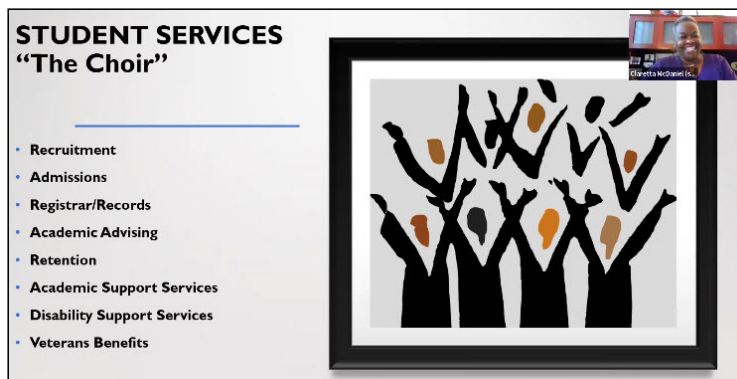
The second workshop, presented by Claretta McDaniel of Howard University School of Divinity, provided information related to connecting enrollment management with student services. McDaniel likened all the different

student services personnel at a school to a choir—many “voices” who accomplish different parts of the work together. “I believe that when all the student services professionals are supported in their work, the choir makes a joyful sound,” she said. She asked two “solo-

ists”—Precious Lowe and Serena Parks, also of Howard University School of Divinity—to speak about how their roles as an academic records coordinator and an admissions and retention coordinator integrate with enrollment management.

Institutional strategic plans, enrollment management strategic priorities, and enrollment management dashboards were the focus areas for the third workshop. Participants were given guidelines to walk through reviewing their own strategic plans and priorities for enrollment management. Grimes and Einfeld hosted the Zoom session that reviewed the basics of strategic planning, data-driven decision making, and evaluating current enrollment management processes.

Grimes addressed a common question of how long a strategic plan is functional. “I’ve always been told that at least every five years the strategic plan should be evaluated, reviewed, analyzed, and maybe even redone completely,” he said. “But even short of that five-year cycle, it should really be something that is nimble. Even though it outlines particular objectives, it’s something that needs to be nimble because the world changes and we need to be able to adapt to the world as it changes.”



Claretta McDaniel compares the many student services roles to voices in a choir.

Groza facilitated the closing plenary about creating a culture of collaboration with Kristen Ferguson, of Gateway Seminary, and Grimes serving as panelists. “I think that finding out where other people come

from and their work experience helps you to kind of start this journey of collaboration with everybody, leveraging their experience for the good of the organization...I appreciate that,” said Groza. All three recorded videos that were posted in Canvas for participants to view ahead of time—Ferguson spoke about faculty participation in recruitment, Grimes spoke about expanding influencers to build enrollment, and Groza spoke about how to lead.

The event concluded with the launch of an optional mentoring program, led by Young and Einfeld, for those who registered in advance to participate. Small groups met via Zoom to reflect on initial questions about their career paths and what they are hoping to gain from a mentoring group. Individual mentoring groups will meet four more times throughout the academic year to discuss ethical dilemmas in recruiting, institution-wide enrollment, data-driven funnel management, and growth and advocacy.

Interested in continuing the conversation? DeNeen Collins, director of recruiting and admissions at Christian Theological Seminary, will be leading a peer networking conversation for admissions personnel at 2 p.m. ET on November 5 via Zoom. Please email [Meghan Niskach](mailto:Meghan.Niskach@ats.edu) to register.



Lisa Kern is Manager of Member Engagement at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.