

# PSE can be a daunting experience, but it doesn't have to be

October 7, 2015 · Academica Group



*How to resolve the top enrolment barriers that decrease student satisfaction and negatively impact enrolment efforts.*

They're called "Enrolment Barriers" for a good reason. If your institution isn't doing all that it can to remove them, there's a good chance your future students will enrol, uninhibited, at a PSE institution down the road, and your current student satisfaction will be underwhelming. Looking for common barriers? Poor relationships with

transactionally focused front line staff, disingenuous interactions with parents, behind-the-times processes/communications and siloed operations are just a few to seek out.

## **Connections start on the front line**

Front line staff are arguably the most direct and prominent influence on dismantling enrolment barriers that face your prospective students and current students alike. Their role in relationship nurturing cannot be underestimated. Through little fault of their own, front line staff tend to suffer from a lack of training and development, as well as a poor understanding of the importance of their roles in relation to institutional and enrolment goals. Staff also tend to be more task-oriented instead of student and service-oriented. However, do administrators enact those kinds of visions for the front lines in educational institutions?

Thought leader in Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) Stefanie Ivan explains, “front line staff matter. When policies are approved and implemented, it is often the front line staff who know if they’re working or not because students express their concerns to the first person readily available.” Taking the time to listen to and understand what students have to say is critical, but front line staff are often too busy with the transactional nature of their roles or the administrative tasks assigned to them; staff have to feel that they have the time to deal with each and every student to build and nurture a genuine relationship.

Success begins by creating and then fostering these front line connections—first with prospective students from the very beginning of their foray into postsecondary education, throughout the application and admission process and throughout their time as a student. How effectively a PSE institution builds and maintains these connections is critical, and investing in the training and development of frontline staff is integral to your enrolment and student retainment efforts.

Dr Laurelle LeVert, Associate Vice President at University of New Brunswick Saint John, agrees with Ivan and adds that every interaction with future students is an “opportunity to demonstrate commitment to them. It does not take much to derail the process.” She argues that having a cohesive institutional approach with a personal touch is paramount to dismantling enrolment barriers—everyone must be on the same

page.

In fact, when almost 1,500 PSE students were asked in a recent Academica Group StudentVu survey what their schools could do to enhance the application process, one-fifth of students also said that a personalized process that treated the applicant as a person was critical to breaking down barriers. And just under half of the students who responded to the survey said that they have had the unfortunate experience of feeling like a “number,” during the application process, and wanted a more personalized approach.

Regardless if it is the application process or another enrolment process, personalizing the approach helps to remove enrolment barriers. Large or small, institutions must find ways to do this.

## **Genuine interactions with the modern parent**

Another common theme that permeates discussions is the prominent and decidedly powerful influence of the modern parent on the increasingly younger generation of learners in PSE. “We have to provide training on how to better communicate with these parents and their children,” says Ivan. “Parents are more engaged than ever, they attend more events, and we need to do a better job of weaving them into the conversation and understanding first year expectations.”

The case for personal and meaningful interactions has never been more necessary because, as Ivan argues, these students will go somewhere where they and their parents feel important and where their concerns are acknowledged, not just tolerated. Creating an atmosphere that welcomes both students and their parents, but helps both to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities in PSE, is an important task. “It doesn’t mean catering to the demands of parents”, says Ivan, “but rather helping them to understand how they can best be a partner in the journey.”

LeVert agrees. On the UNBSJ campus, they run specially designed academic advising sessions for parents and students which creates a focus on academic success.

Pushing parents to the side line or making them feel like anything less than partners in the success of their children’s educational journey is an insulting concept for these

parents who have been actively involved in all aspects of their children's lives, and will continue to support them through and beyond their time at postsecondary.

## **Meeting 21st-century realities**

It's important to understand how your future and current students communicate and how they want to be communicated to. Ivan notes that students generally don't want to download PDFs, print and fill out applications or other forms: more importantly, they know they don't have to. Ivan believes that these kinds of hurdles can be perceived as barriers compelling your future students to move on to the next school—the one where the application process (or other process) suits their lived experience, preferences and is followed up by conscientious staff or faculty. Or they can decrease the satisfaction and overall experience of your current students.

Knowing how often to communicate in any process and by what means, and having a clear message is critical. Some institutions under communicate with their applicants while others over communicate; it's important to ask students for feedback and use that feedback as an indication of what works and what doesn't.

## **No more silos, we're working together**

Nothing can frustrate a student more than when their questions are met with what is commonly known as “the run around” between siloed departments. The need to break down institutional silos is paramount. “In this competitive day and age, one must ensure that senior administrators are champions of bringing staff together to solve enrolment barrier problems;” Ivan argues, “without their understanding and continued support, problems can continue to build and permeate an institution.”

A symptom of some of the disconnects between institutional departments are the myriad of varying due dates. Do your admission dates correspond well with your residence acceptance and deposit dates? More importantly, do they make sense given the timing of many of your students' transitions from high school, or the work force, into post-secondary life? Nothing can frustrate a student more than a series of apparently arbitrary due dates that are backed by a set of unjustified penalties.

With personal and timely communication with students, these timelines can be less daunting and challenging. Students who responded to the [Academica Group StudentVu](#) survey suggested that “applying to post-secondary schooling is very lengthy and confusing.” Some even felt that they had to “pry very important information from [their institutions].” One-third of students suggested that improved communication (both within the institution and between applicant and institution) was key element to unlocking enrolment barriers, since they struggled to get clear, timely answers from many of the institutions that they applied to.

A key strategy to unlocking enrolment barriers is putting students at the centre of the enrolment experience and then ensuring that your administrative needs are aligned. Ivan discusses a technique she uses when conducting on-campus workshops to break down these types of enrolment barriers:



I like to bring together all the various groups involved and have them recreate the current state of enrolment and the future state of enrolment using empathy mapping; it is a fun, yet powerful way for individuals from all areas to connect and see what can happen when barriers are removed.

Enrolment barriers can be any of the ones stated above or they can be unique to your own campus. Removing enrolment barriers may seem like an insurmountable hurdle on your campus, but the reality is that these barriers must be reduced or eliminated so that future and current students are satisfied. Your future enrolment depends on it.

☐ 5 Likes    ☐ Share



Academica Group

It all starts with a deep understanding of the sector, the institution and the stakeholder groups. We'll bring our two decades of applicant and student survey data and combine it with custom research that is specific to the challenge you're facing or strategy you're considering. How do applicants perceive your institution? How can feedback from your graduates improve your student experience?

Other articles you might enjoy



## The future of education and skills development in Canada

Academica Group

With change comes opportunity. In Canada, along with the rest of the world, the evolution to a knowledge-based economy is putting stresses on our public and private sectors.



## PSE can be a daunting experience, but it doesn't have to be

Academica Group

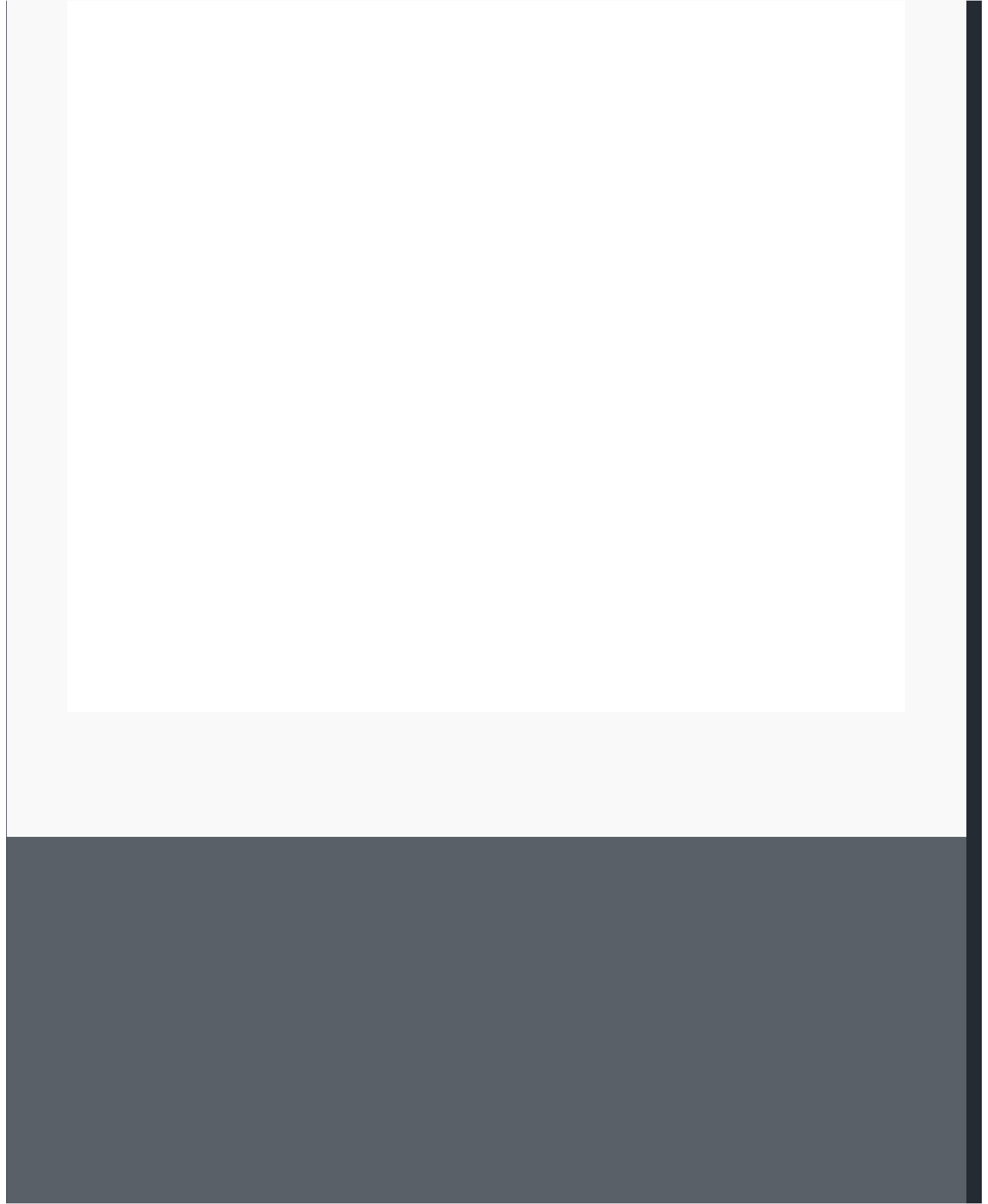
A key strategy to unlocking enrolment barriers is putting students at the centre of the enrolment experience and then ensuring that your administrative needs are aligned.



## To turn intentions into votes, students say, "change your message"

Academica Group

A recent StudentVU survey indicates that postsecondary student votes could tip the scales this election and usher in a new federal government.





# ULTIMATE APPLICANT INSIGHT

Take control of your growth strategy and reach your market - every time.

SEE HOW

*Canada's leading institutions use UCAS*



COMMENTING POLICY

© 2015 Academia Group. Visit [academica.ca](http://academica.ca) for more information.



