SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Location: San Diego, CA
Focus Areas: Diversity and Inclusion

San Diego State University (SDSU) is a public four-year institution and flagship of the California State University system with 30,848 undergraduate students. Approximately one-third of undergraduates receive Pell grants, and 32% identify as Hispanic/Latinx, qualifying SDSU as a Hispanic Serving Institution.

At A Glance:

» Designed a multifaceted virtual admission and orientation program focused on building a sense of belonging

» Utilized a network of existing systems to administer proactive, high-touch interventions with specific initiatives for priority student populations

Approach Overview

San Diego State University offers a multifaceted approach to serving the institution's diverse first-year students in a virtual environment. SDSU utilizes a network of systems to administer proactive, high-touch and student-centric interventions. The institution's admitted student program – Virtual Explore SDSU – is open to all prospective and admitted students, alumni, and members of the SDSU community. Each event includes a combination of live and recorded sessions.

The interactive virtual events enable admitted students to begin networking with faculty in their area of interest, and start making connections with other SDSU students to begin building a support structure. SDSU offers tailored supports for first-year students through virtual orientation activities and advising appointments through the institution's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Compact for Success (Compact), and @CORE programs.

In the spring of 2020, SDSU also initiated a new Campus Assistance, Response, Engagement and Support (CARES) Team – a cross-functional group of 170 staff and peer mentors – to coordinate a series of outreach campaigns (calls, text messages, and emails) for underrepresented students, students with financial holds, and those who had not advance registered for the following semester. Lack of access to computers and stable internet connectivity were common challenges faced by students identified through the outreach campaigns. CARES Team staff provided support and worked with SDSU's Economic Crisis Response Team to circulate hundreds of laptop computers and internet signal boosters.

Virtual programs are delivered primarily through three systems: (1) EAB Navigate, used to identify, communicate and engage students through campaigns, (2) Canvas, used as SDSU's primary Learning Management System and to generate engagement analytics, and (3) Zoom, used for both workshops and individual appointments. While Navigate is the primary system for frequent student check-ins, the three systems work in tandem with one another, enabling staff to optimize use of data. For instance, a student's lack of engagement in Canvas will result in an early alert flag from an instructor on a progress report in Navigate. That action then prompts the student's advisor to run a campaign in Navigate, encouraging the student to make a virtual appointment (which is scheduled in Navigate and administered in Zoom). Students also receive text messages, including links to short, encouraging YouTube videos from faculty who had themselves been first generation students. Supplementing these systems, SDSU uses ivy.ai for live chat during business hours and an automated chat bot during after hours, the latter leveraging artificial intelligence to help students quickly find answers and resources in an always on virtual environment.

While many of the systems that SDSU uses to support students are not unique in higher education, the institution's deployment of them through a campus-wide program, breaking down organizational barriers, can serve as a model for other institutions.

SDSU uses a coordinated approach to virtual support efforts, and proactively identifies ways that systems can work in tandem in order to maximize outreach efforts:

" There needs to be articulated accountability and responsibility, but you can still have that joined across different divisions. It doesn't have to have just one centralized person. "

" We're not able to do what we need to do, based on the size of our student body, if we don't have systems that can help us along the way. Those systems and those technologies are not about replacing people. It's actually the opposite. They're about creating closer ties between people. "