



# Washington State University

## Shaping the Class with ACT® | NRCCUA®

Established in 1890, Washington State University (WSU) is known for making discoveries that improve lives, having professors that are among the best in their fields, and for offering a broad-base of academic programs to suit almost any interest. Perhaps that's why it can proudly display its desire to inspire the next generation of problem solvers who go out into the world and strive to make it a better place.

WSU is also well known as one of America's top research universities, and is one of only a small handful that has been named among doctoral universities with the highest research activity in the Carnegie Classification. Perhaps even more amazing is that this focus on and access to great research opportunities is extended to undergraduate as well as graduate students. Michelle Lewis, Director of Undergraduate Recruitment at WSU noted, "One of our greatest benefits is our undergraduate research and accessibility to internships early on in a student's career. Most other universities don't offer this, especially to undergrads. Our students get a lot of incredible opportunities, often that ultimately lead to great jobs right when they graduate."

Another feature of WSU that makes it unique is that it's a very large institution in a rural location. This unusual combination has helped the school form a truly close-knit community and personalized experience not typical of large schools. Lewis said, "We offer access to so many activities and opportunities

### Challenge

- Grow enrollment while ensuring adequate resources were available for the incoming class
- Target new markets
- Diversify the incoming class by attracting first generation and out-of-state students

### Solution

- Encoura™ Data Lab
- Encoura Enrollment Services

### Benefits

- Brought in the largest and strongest class in the school's history
- Provided access to information and insight across multiple departments
- Improved marketing and recruiting ROI

for engagement, whether social, academic, athletic, etc., and everything happens right here on campus vs. off-campus. This goes to further that strong sense of community that we have here. Whether it's among our students or between faculty, staff and students, it's a truly unique and engaging environment.”

## The Status of Enrollment

Lewis, now on her second tour with WSU, began her career in higher education working for a couple of community colleges in Nevada and California and doing a lot of community and grant-related work. From there, she spent a year at the University of Idaho, and then made the move to WSU. After revisiting U of I again 5 years later, she returned to WSU in 2015 and has been there ever since.

Upon returning, Lewis discovered that there had been a number of changes in the leadership team in the enrollment areas. The new team was working hard to more clearly define the priorities around how to grow and shape their classes in order to improve retention rates. Lewis said, “Our goal has always been to grow, but not at the expense of students not being prepared.”

For the first couple of years since her return to the school, the team made some pretty significant changes to their admissions practices and communications strategies to try to focus on different markets, such as out-of-state and first generation students. Lewis was tasked with growing enrollment, while ensuring they only admitted as many students as they had resources to support - particularly when it came to kids on the proverbial bubble.

## Getting the Help They Needed

Tasked with keeping enrollment numbers high, while also refining and opening new markets, Lewis had her eyes open for solutions to help them meet their goals. That's when she re-discovered ACT® | NRCCUA® and the new portfolio of technology, data science, analytics and research programs the company had to offer.

While WSU had worked with ACT | NRCCUA in the past, Lewis acknowledged, “Honestly, I'm not sure I fully understood the scope of new services ACT | NRCCUA had to offer until I had a chance to see demos of Encoura™ Data Lab at NACAC last year.”

Encoura Data Lab is an enrollment management technology platform that combines student intelligence data, advanced analytics, and education-specific research so higher education institutions can be more strategic in their approach to achieving their recruiting goals. Users of the tool can search and segment millions of profiles nationwide and identify and analyze target markets through segmentations such as gender, GPA, major interest, and much more. They can also interact with their enrollment data—from all sources—to fully analyze and understand the institution's recruitment funnel.

After the demo, Lewis instantly recognized that having access to Encoura Data Lab would dramatically change their access to information and insights that could help them make better, faster, more strategic decisions. Case in point, WSU's older CRM system had limited their ability to easily access key information. Doing so was incredibly labor intensive, and what they got wasn't robust or complete. In addition, they were getting the data much later than was truly practical or helpful. Vendors they were using performed in silos, so there was no

broad-based, high level view. They even began questioning the integrity of the data because it was coming from so many different sources.

Lewis said, “Now, with Encoura Data Lab, I can see everything in one place and as a whole, but I can also hone in and see very specific segments, such as first source data or geographies we are considering as new territories. Encoura Data Lab has not only been a huge time saver, it has really helped me stay on track and be mindful of what our data is telling us about our performance. It has been incredibly impactful.”

## Going Beyond Enrollment

Lewis also recognized that Encoura Data Lab could have a profound and positive impact, not only on her own work, but on that of departments across the campus.

Lewis went on to relay a simple, but meaningful example, saying, “We were behind in non-resident inquiries. Our communications manager - who has no background in enrollment or data analysis, mind you - was able to go into Encoura Data Lab and keep an eye on inquiry progression in those key areas. She then crafted specific messages to prospective students in states where we were down. She even used content from current students who were from those areas. As a result, we caught back up.”

## A True Fall Advantage

One of WSU’s goals for their fall cycle was to really hone-in on where they were spending their marketing and recruiting dollars in search of ways to improve their ROI. They were also trying to better understand where they should place their recruiters. Once again, Encoura Data Lab was able to provide the insight they needed.



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*Director of Undergraduate Recruitment, Washington State University*



“Encoura Data Lab definitely makes data less scary for people who aren’t in the data trenches on a daily basis,” said Lewis. “It’s a practical presentation of data, and pretty much anyone can understand it. Across the institution, many more people have the ability to access important data and understand it, which means it has a very broad-based impact on our school.”

Lewis said, “Because of the information we got from Encoura Data Lab, we recently stepped into the highly populated Chicago market and into Texas, which of course, is a huge geographical area. Encoura Data Lab made it really easy to see which counties, school districts and even specific schools to visit. We actually have a recruiter in Chicago right now who is then flying straight to Texas. She used the data from Data Lab to plan her travel and to figure where her time could be best spent.”

## A Partner Like No Other

Of course, Lewis herself might be described as an Encoura Data Lab power user. She is in the system nearly daily and admitted to geeking out over the easy access to such in-depth, actionable information. And while Encoura Data Lab is absolutely “geek-out worthy,” what has most impressed Lewis is the service she receives from the ACT|NRCCUA team. Lewis said, “What has really made me want to continue the relationship with NRCCUA is the level of service I receive from them. The Enrollment Services team takes the time to look for pockets of opportunity where we can potentially make up for lost ground or where we might have some deficiency. More than anything, I really appreciate that. It’s a great partnership.”

She went on to compare it to other vendor relationships she has had in the past, noting, “The ACT | NRCCUA team feels like an extended part of our staff. They’re genuinely invested in our goals and results.”

Lewis concluded, “It has definitely taken time to bring our plan to fruition, but this year, we brought in the strongest and largest freshman class in the history of WSU. Now we’re trying to review that and refine it. Our goals for next year are to prioritize shaping the class, focusing on student preparedness and serving underrepresented populations - all while maintaining enrollment. And we’ll be working with the ACT | NRCCUA team and Encoura Data Lab to do it.”