



George Mason University

Supporting Students as a Unified University

Virginia's largest public research university, George Mason University, is an "innovative and inclusive academic community committed to creating a more just, free, and prosperous world." Aligned with this mission, Mason produces strong graduation rates and career outcomes across all student demographics.

Mason's Senior Director of Integrated Enrollment Marketing, Caitlin Shear, shared how her team employs the university's priority of putting students first from the moment they start reaching out to prospective students. Most recently, the team leveraged the latest research from Eduventures Student Mindsets—accessed through their partnership with Encoura—to personally support students throughout their college search.

Supporting Students' Changing Minds

Shear explained that this individual support was especially important given how her team was seeing students change their college decisions as a result of the lingering COVID-19 pandemic. "We were specifically interested in adding more intel to our student personas—for both in- and out-of-state students—in order to customize our communications in a way that felt more like a conversation, rather than us guessing what the students would want to hear. The Eduventures Student Mindsets have not just helped us hone our own communications, but also explain to stakeholders across the university why we need to support students differently now."

Challenge

- More insight into student personas of their in- and out-of state students
- Customize communications to feel like relevant and helpful conversations with students
- Data for university stakeholders to understand varied student communication needs

Solution

- Eduventures® Prospective Student Mindsets™
- Eduventures® Student Sentiment Report™
- Encoura® Platform: Class Planner™ & Enrollment Lens™

Benefits

- Exceeded overall freshman enrollment goals & yield predictions
- Launched most popular video assets, connecting prospective students with current students and financial aid support resources
- Equipped multiple departments on campus with student data and personas to better serve students at all stages from inquiry through first year experience

Elaborating on how this research has unified the campus community's recruitment efforts, Shear added, "We have a lot of ideas and get a lot of suggestions about how we should market to students. The Mindsets give us a framework for targeting students earlier and earlier in the funnel. It helped us articulate our messaging priorities to colleagues in a way that was incredibly helpful."

adjust their marketing efforts to best support these students. "Specifically, it influenced our decision to start a current student video blog series. We were on the fence about dedicating resources to that strategy before, but when Eduventures Research also confirmed students' prioritization of video in college search, it gave us the confidence to launch one of our most popular video assets. Prospective



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She also shared about how Eduventures Student Mindsets are refining George Mason's messaging strategy to make their outreach more personalized. "If someone has worked in Admissions for years, they have experience knowing what messaging typically goes out to prospective students at different times in the funnel. The Mindsets give more insight into how this messaging can be more strategically broken down by student type."

One of the most crucial insights that Eduventures Research provided the Mason team with was how a specific kind of student was more attracted to their institution than expected. Shear shared, "In 2020, we had more Social Focus students in the Eduventures Student Mindsets data than we thought. Knowing that we had more social students helped us start connecting more prospective students to current students." She explained how knowing that they were attracting more students who were seeking connections with others on campus motivated them to

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Staying connected with Eduventures Student Mindsets revealed important information to the Mason enrollment marketing team as the pandemic led their prospective students to start shifting to another specific Student Mindset — Career Pragmatist. This allowed the team to be able to continue to best support their students, even as the uncertainty of the pandemic was leading their prospective students to more strongly focus on their careers after graduation.

Shear explained, "As the pandemic continued, our students' predominant mindsets began to lean more toward the Career Pragmatists Mindset which informed our decision to spend more time on financial literacy content and making sure students understood what types

of support they would be receiving. Mason serves a large number of first-generation students who often don't have family members or mentors who can provide that support. The Mindset information really helped us pivot our content focus with confidence. Mindset-specific information led Mason to augment their financial aid support with a personalized video, leading to extremely high engagement with admitted students in yield.

platform because everyone wanted to see the data—including colleagues in the Office for University Branding—because it also informs the work they do with their teams.”

“The Dean of Admissions and his team use the Encoura platform regularly to analyze regions to recruit by territory,” Shear continued. “I’m more focused with my team on how the Mindsets might be changing



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Equipping The Campus as a Whole

In addition to shaping the decisions of the Mason enrollment marketing team, other departments have also been strategically considering how Student Mindsets can equip them to better support students to improve not only recruitment, but retention. Shear shared, “Leadership is interested in using the Mindsets not only for prospective students, but also how the Mindset information can help inform the student communication plan for the First Year Experience. We see potential value in the use of the Mindsets as students continue through George Mason, so we are really seeing the Eduventures Research move beyond recruitment.”

Eduventures Research is just one part of the Encoura partnership that Mason has been able to use to impact multiple departments on campus. Shear elaborated, “I had to have my Encoura consultant add multiple people to the

and impacted by different external factors. Encoura data helps us invest in a strategy that will have measurable results. There has been a tremendous amount of interest across campus in the Encoura platform so that each department can get deeper insight into their prospective students.”

Shear shared how working with the data from the Encoura platform equipped Mason to execute on their strategies and exceed enrollment goals and expectations. “We exceeded our overall freshman enrollment goals in 2021, even given the ongoing pandemic. Our melt was less than in a typical year which surprised us given the circumstances. The content adjustments in line with Student Mindsets certainly helped with yield and melt.”

A Home-Run Partnership

Lastly, Shear described her overall satisfaction with her partnership with Encoura and Eduventures Research. “I have high standards for my own team and for external teams who are partnering with us. In terms of the quality of the product, the understanding of deliverables, dependability and collegiality, Encoura is a home run on all fronts. I’m getting excellent data that I can’t get elsewhere; I’m dealing with incredibly smart individuals who are enthusiastic about helping me; and the representatives truly care about you reaching your goals.”

Shear specifically emphasized her appreciation of how the partnership has benefited the university as a whole. “Our Encoura and Eduventures consultants have joined me in meetings to update our university colleagues throughout the year and these stakeholders always leave excited about what they hear and what we are doing. Stakeholder management is an extremely important part of what we do and that has been incredibly successful,” she explained. “There are only a couple of outside partners that I would recommend, and Encoura is certainly one of them.”