University of Southern Maine

Draft Recommendation

The following recommendations are all based specifically in the market data surfaced in our study.

Undergraduate Adult Students:
University of Southern Maine is the most widely recognized institutions in the region, has been attended by more past adult undergraduate students than any other, and is rated as the institution people would like to enroll in most, but enrollments are declining. Given these factors we have concluded that “delivery” (format and scheduling) is the area in which the University will have to focus in order to convert name recognition and the high perception of quality to more enrollments.

Degree/Nondegree study
1. Non-degree Offerings: USM should diversify its non-degree credit offerings. Modular learning, whereby adult learners earn certificates in professional topics that can be combined toward a future degree, should be considered (in order to capitalize on the 45% of the market not pursuing a degree).
2. Individual Courses: Non-matriculated individual course taking should also be encouraged, as more and more adults want to “try out” an institution before they start a program of study.
3. High Demand Degrees: Degree study is largely in Business and the Social Sciences. These degree programs need to be made available in Portland, or south of Portland along the I-95 corridor, as well as online.
4. Recognition of Prior Credit: USM needs to ensure that its undergraduate programs for adult students are designed for students who have earned credit at previous institutions, and that general education courses are easily waived based on either college transcript evaluation or prior learning assessment. With 65 percent of adults having attended a community college at one time in their past, and with many having 60 or more credits already earned, USM stands to lose students over how much credit is accepted and what requirements previous credit can earn.

Schedules and Formats
5. Part-time Study: Programs need to be designed with part-time students in mind, by either offering part-time programs, or full-time programs that employ the use of compressed/accelerated courses in order to allow students to work and go to school at the same time. This region’s undergraduate adult students are more interested in part-time study (75%) than anywhere we have recently studied.
6. Evening Study: High demand programs need to be made fully available through evening study. In some cases these evening programs could require students to enroll in online classes in order to finish in a timely manner.
7. **Online/Hybrid Study**: Online and hybrid courses need to be made available in large numbers in all high demand subject areas. Nearly half the market would most prefer to enroll in fully online classes, and 40 percent of the market have not recently engaged in ANY traditional classroom learning (semester-length study in a classroom).

8. **Hybrid Programs**: Hybrid programs that are completed largely through independent/online study but with periodic classroom sessions should be considered in high demand fields. Such programs should not meet face-to-face more than every other week, or less. Such programs could increase the penetration of USM as an option for people living further away from Portland.

9. **Accelerated/Compressed Study**: Accelerated course need to be made available in much larger numbers. 60 percent of the market most prefer to enroll in courses of 12 weeks or less. USM should consider offering two 7-8 week blocks each semester for courses in high demand programs.

10. **Multiple Format Options**: The mid-range goal should be to have full programs in high demand areas available in both traditional length, accelerated classroom and online versions – with students able to enroll in any course format each semester that best meets their schedule.

11. **Location of Study**: Programs offered for undergraduate adult students should be located in Portland or south of Portland on the I-95 corridor.

**Marketing:**

12. **Prospective Adult Student Target**: USM needs to attract undergraduate adult students from a wide geography along the I-95 corridor. The target is a 35 year old, white female. She is more often single than married with no children and she works full-time. Her total family income is about $55,000. She seeks study to change or advance her career – although she is significantly less likely to be starting her first career.

13. **Focus on Affordability and Having a Convenient Location**: USM should promote itself as among the most affordable and convenient institutions in the area in order to capitalize on the fact that cost and convenience of study location were the two most important decision-making factors cited by respondents.

14. **Focus of Marketing Messages on Convenience and Flexibility**: USM should focus marketing and outreach messages on the following factors that were very likely to increase undergraduate adult student interest in USM:
   a. USM offers over 500 online courses year-round that are either fully online or blend online and on-campus learning.
   b. USM offers many methods to away academic credit for prior learning and life experience.
   c. USM offers degree completion programs for students who have earned some college credits but haven’t finished a bachelor’s degree.

15. **Website**: Marketing should start with an easily navigable, adult friendly website that contains the information most important to an adult student: available programs, cost of study, schedule of courses, and detailed course descriptions.
16. **Web-based Marketing**: Only once the USM website has been configured for adult navigation, marketing strategies should rely heavily on the internet. Start by advancing search engine optimization, having a presence on college search sites, and supporting the entire web strategy with traditional direct mail in the region.

17. **Convert Recognition and Quality to Enrollments**: USM needs to convert its very solid name recognition in the region into stronger market awareness of its offerings and the benefits of attending. It is the institution most often attended, the most preferred for future attendance, and the highest rated among a set of peer institutions, and yet enrollments still lag.... USM must begin to understand why. The reason is likely to be that its programs and services are not set up to meet demand.

18. **Competitors**: USM is competing with SNHU, and should fully understand how it offers its programs and seek to counter with just an attractive offering at a lower price. The University also has the opportunity to “steal” market share from University of Maine at Augusta, Kaplan University, and Salem State University – each of which attract more students than would prefer to be there.
Graduate Students:
University of Southern Maine is not quite as well known at the graduate level as it is at the undergraduate level. It is also rated in the “middle of the pack” in regard to institutions with which it competes for graduate students. Nonetheless, it is a respected, well known institution that offers study at an affordable cost – all features that are important elements of adult graduate students’ decision-making. It is essential that USM convert this awareness into more enrollments. Again, at this level we see the primary “roadblock” to higher increased enrollments in the broad area of course and program format and scheduling.

Degree/Nondegree study
1. **Non-degree Offerings**: USM should diversify its non-degree credit professional certificate, licensing or diploma offerings – focusing on education, and healthcare related programs. These options represent fully one-quarter of the graduate student market.
2. **Individual Courses**: Non-matriculated individual course taking should also be encouraged, as more and more graduate students want to “try out” an institution before they start a program of study. Such individuals represent 20 percent of the graduate market.
3. **High Demand Degrees**: Degree study is largely in Business, Education and the Health Professions. These degree programs need to be made available in Portland, or south of Portland along the I-95 corridor, as well as online.

Schedules and Formats
4. **Part-time Study**: Programs need to be designed with part-time graduate students in mind, by either offering part-time programs, or full-time programs that employ the use of compressed/accelerated courses in order to allow students to work and go to school at the same time.
5. **Evening Study**: High demand programs (in Business, Education and Health Professions) need to be made fully available through evening study. In some cases these evening programs could require students to enroll in online classes in order to finish in a timely manner.
6. **Online/Hybrid Study**: Online and hybrid courses need to be made available in large numbers in all high demand subject areas. Nearly half the market would most prefer to enroll in fully online classes, and 40 percent of the market has not recently engaged in ANY traditional classroom learning (semester-length study in a classroom). Those that have recently enrolled in online and hybrid courses rate their experiences very highly (4.1 on a 5-point scale).
7. **Hybrid Programs**: Hybrid programs that are completed largely through independent/online study but with periodic classroom sessions should be considered in high demand fields. Such programs should not meet face-to-face only a few times each term. Such programs are of even higher interest at the graduate level than at the undergraduate level. These programs could increase the penetration of USM as an option for people living further away from Portland.
8. **Accelerated/Compressed Study:** Accelerated course need to be made available in much larger numbers. 79 percent of the market most prefer to enroll in courses of 12 weeks or less (60 percent prefer 10 or fewer weeks). USM should consider offering two 7-8 week blocks each semester for courses in high demand programs.

9. **Multiple Format Options:** The mid-range goal should be to have full programs in high demand areas available in traditional (classroom) length, accelerated classroom and online versions – with students able to enroll in any course format each semester that best meets their schedule.

10. **Location of Study:** Programs offered to

**Marketing:**

11. **Prospective Graduate Student Target:** USM needs to attract graduate adult students from a wide geography along the I-95 corridor. The target is a 35 year old, white female, who works full time and has a total family of about $75,000. She is more often single than married with no children. She seeks study to advance her career.

12. **Focus on Quality AND Affordability and Convenience:** USM should promote itself as a high quality institution that is among the most affordable and convenient institutions in the area in order to capitalize on the fact that quality AND cost and convenience of study location were both important decision-making factors cited by respondents.

13. **Focus of Marketing Messages on Convenience and Flexibility:** USM should focus marketing and outreach messages on the following factors that were very likely to increase undergraduate adult student interest in USM:
   a. USM offers over 500 online courses year-round that are either fully online or blend online and on-campus learning.
   b. USM offers many methods to away academic credit for prior learning and life experience.
   c. USM offers degree completion programs for students who have earned some college credits but haven’t finished a bachelor’s degree.

14. **Website:** Marketing should start with an easily navigable, adult friendly website that contains the information most important to a graduate student: available programs, cost of study, schedule of courses, and detailed course descriptions.

15. **Web-based Marketing:** Only once the USM website has been configured for adult navigation, marketing strategies should rely heavily on the internet. Start by advancing search engine optimization, having a presence on college search sites, and supporting the entire web strategy with traditional direct mail in the region.

16. **Convert Recognition and Quality to Enrollments:** USM needs to convert its very solid name recognition in the region into stronger market awareness of its offerings and the benefits of attending. The reason that more people who know it and respect it, but don’t enroll is likely to be that its programs and services are not set up to meet demand.

17. **Competitors:** USM is competing with SNHU, and should fully understand how it offers its programs and seek to counter with just an attractive offering at a lower price.