Retention marketing: Higher education's new frontier

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Abstract

The higher education landscape is changing: 75 per cent of Generation Z say that college is not the only way to get a good education. The 2008 birth dearth has shrunk our pool of 18-year-olds by 15 per cent. National Association for College Admission Counseling's (NACAC's) ethic code changes mean colleges can poach our students like never before — and that was all before COVID-19. In this new frontier, retention marketing is paramount. This paper provides insights and approaches to retention marketing that will fit a wide range of audience needs, including case studies from our work at UC Davis Student Affairs Marketing and Communications as it relates to retention and our research into Gen Z.

Keywords

INTRODUCTION

The University of California at Davis is perhaps best known as the number one agriculture school in the United States and the number one veterinary school in the world, with ranked programmes in biological sciences, business, education and engineering. Since we first opened in 1908, we have been known for standout academics and sustainability as well as valuing the Northern California lifestyle. These themes are woven into our history and our reputation for solving problems related to food, health, the environment and society.

We have almost 40,000 enrolled students — the vast majority of whom are members of Generation Z. Like our ever-evolving student population, the higher education landscape itself is evolving: 75 per cent of Gen Z say that college is not the only way to get a good education.[1] The 2008 birth dearth has shrunk our pool of 18-year-olds by 15 per cent.[2] The National Association for College Admission Counseling's (NACAC's) ethic code changes[3] mean colleges can poach our students like never before — and that was all before COVID-19. In this new frontier, retention marketing is paramount.

UC Davis Student Affairs Marketing and Communications (SAMC) has focused on retention marketing for over a decade. We have experience working within wildly different budgets, resources and staffing models, allowing us to share insights and approaches to retention marketing that will fit a wide range of audience needs, including case studies from our work as it relates to retention and our research into Gen Z.

RETENTION MARKETING AT UC DAVIS

History and background

SAMC began as a pilot programme in 2010, uniting marketing resources and expertise from across the Division of Student Affairs in an effort to support current student retention. The team consisted of marketers from Undergraduate Admissions, Student Life and Divisional Resources.

After the pilot proved successful, the 6-person team expanded to 25, and the portfolio expanded to include the auxiliary units — student housing and dining services, campus recreation and student health and counseling services.

In 2018, the university restructured, which led to our current centralised yet decentralised model and a core team of eight full-time staff. The auxiliary communicators moved back to their home departments but still under the direction of SAMC leadership. Enrolment management, including undergraduate admissions, moved out of the division entirely.

SAMC is the primary communicator for all undergraduate students at UC Davis. We directly support the Vice Chancellor's Office as well as the entire Student Life portfolio, consisting of 30 departments. We also support academic retention services including our four retention initiatives focused on under-represented minority students as well as cocurricular retention efforts that improve sense of belonging and connection to campus. We like to say that we handle everything outside of the classroom.

Communications pipeline

At UC Davis, we have created a communications pipeline, beginning with

prospective students and ending with alums, offering a consistent student message, seamless transitions and a shared brand experience. Undergraduate admissions sets a campaign theme for prospective materials, which is then used in yield and melt communications. This theme is also carried out through high-level divisional communications to students and echoed throughout various celebrations throughout the year.

Incoming students join Facebook groups for their graduating class, which actively promote community and retention services throughout their undergraduate experience. These groups are created by enrolment management in partnership with SAMC. Once the academic year begins, moderation is transitioned fully to the SAMC team, and as the students graduate, the groups are handed off to alumni relations to begin the work of transitioning them to donors and engaged volunteers.

Partnerships and key stakeholders

Knowing that retention marketing cannot succeed in silos, we partner directly with all communications units across the UC Davis campus, including the following:

- Development and alumni relations
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Enrolment management
- Finance, operations and administration
- Global affairs
- Strategic communications
- Undergraduate education

As the campus experts on current students, our partners look to us for the following:

- Chancellor-initiated projects and campaigns for a current student audience
- Crisis and emergency response
- Reputation management
- Training in the university brand for student-facing units

UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATION Z AUDIENCE

To be successful in retention, we have to know our audience. While the media has focused on Millennials, Generation Z has quietly taken their place in and beyond higher education without endless think pieces and headlines.

Demographics

Members of Gen Z were born between 1996 and 2010, making them 11–25 years old. They make up 26 per cent of the US population,[4] which is the largest age cohort in the country. Even more noteworthy, they are the most diverse generation in US history (see Table 1).

Additionally, only 66 per cent of Gen Z identify as 'exclusively heterosexual', in stark contrast to 71 per cent of Millennials, 85 per cent of Gen X and 88 per cent of Baby Boomers.[6]

A CRISIS WORLD VIEW

A defining characteristic of Gen Z is that crisis has shaped their world view.

TABLE 1 Demographics

Gen Z by Ethnicity[5]	
Non-Hispanic White	52%
Hispanic	25%
African American	14%
Asian	6%
Multiracial	5%

During the banking crisis of 2008, they ranged in age from 12 years old to not even born yet. This generation saw their parents' average net worth drop by 38 per cent between 2007 and 2010.[7] The economic turmoil that followed left an indelible mark on the children of Gen Z.

Not only that, the recession also led to a nearly 15 per cent decline in birth rates in the United States, a number that has not yet rebounded. This decline is called a birth dearth. While there is a lot of speculation about the effects it will have on higher education in general, one thing is certain — it will change the landscape for nearly all of us, making retention marketing efforts a necessity.

COVID-19 has brought even more economic turmoil and has compounded a whole slew of other issues for this generation. As a result, Gen Z worries about the economy more than anything else, and 71 per cent say that they are focused on saving for the future.[8] They also believe company and employer loyalty is a myth, which chips away at our 'authority' as the university.

Despite this, the majority of Gen Z is still optimistic; 77 per cent of Gen Z also report feeling optimistic about their future personal wellbeing,[9] and 56 per cent of Gen Z feel optimistic about their professional future.[10] It is important to note, however, that COVID-19 is already negatively impacting these levels of optimism.[11]

Marketing applications

Their experience of the recession in childhood colours Gen Z's decision-making and world view. Factoring in the current state of COVID-19, they are more acutely aware of what has value to them. That means we have to be able to easily explain the value of what we are offering them. Questions like 'Is this worth their time?' and 'Is this worth their money?' should always be top of mind when marketing to this group.

At an institutional level, we should be asking ourselves if current students believe they are getting their money's worth at our institutions and if our students are aware of all of the many, often disjointed, programmes, services and resources that we offer. This is a key part of recruiting students, but it often falls to the wayside when it comes to our current students.

To that end, retention and enrolment teams need to work together. To cope with the national changes the birth dearth is bringing, we need to update enrolment marketing strategies now. It is a very simple concept, but we cannot retain students we do not have. That is why it is fundamentally important that the enrolment funnel transitions to retention as soon as they become current students. At UC Davis, we have brought together communicators and leadership from enrolment management, student affairs and undergraduate education to strategize and create a shared content calendar to ensure that our incoming students have a seamless communications experience.

Case study: Student Satisfaction Survey

In 2019, the Division of Student Affairs launched a five-year survey to hear directly from students what was working well and where additional attention may be needed in the division's service areas. The 26 participating departments represented a wide range of student services, from campus recreation to student health and counseling services and from student

housing and dining services to student government.

This confidential survey allows the students to tell us directly if services and programmes are worth their time and money, and then we are able to compare the results with participation data collected through our swipe card access system for each service to have a more holistic view of the student experience.

To ensure as much participation as possible, we held focus groups with students to understand their motivations, allowing us to develop an appropriate incentives programme. Over the six-week duration, we canvassed the campus with a-frames, yard signs, liquid crystal display (LCD) advertisements, posters and window decals promoting the survey and incentives. Students received four e-mails from various administrators throughout the time period asking them to complete the survey. We ran a full social media campaign and provided an online toolkit for our partners to promote the survey themselves.

Based on survey takers' feedback, each of the 26 participating administrative units gained a better understanding of where their services are most successful from a student perspective and where to focus efforts and resources towards improvements. We also worked with administration and unit leaders to create customised action plans for each department with both short- and long-term goals in response to survey feedback, which we released publicly to all students along with the survey results.

Knowing this was a multiyear project, the short-term goals were specifically improvement opportunities that would be addressed before the next year's survey. Capitalising on these improvements was a way of being transparent with the students while also giving us success stories to highlight in our marketing for the next year. As an example, the 2020 collateral included messaging like, 'Have you noticed the new seating options inside and outside the Memorial Union? That's just one example of how Student Affairs units have acted on feedback from our inaugural survey in 2019'.

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS

In 2008, the United States elected its first African American president. For the most racially diverse generation ever, this was a watershed moment. In 2020, the United States was thrust in a new tipping point with racial injustice, gender inequity and healthcare access. These monumental changes have played a large part in their lives, leading Gen Z to be a more socially conscious generation.

Eighty-eight per cent of Gen Z say that they have a responsibility to make positive change in the world,[12] but only 7 per cent of Gen Z say that they trust people in power.[13] They do not see themselves represented in government. So, when the government fails, they turn to companies and organisations, like universities, to enact the change they want to see in the world.

Big brands are noticing and capitalising. In 2019, Nike released the 'I Believe' ad immediately after the US Women's team won the World Cup. In the minute-long spot, the narrator says, 'I believe that we will be four-time champions and keep winning until we not only become the best female soccer team, but the best soccer team in the world'. It echoes the 'I Believe' chant to rally for equal rights for women that go beyond the soccer field, to women 'breaking every single glass ceiling' and 'having their faces carved on Mt. Rushmore'.

The ad got 5 million YouTube views and 22.6 million Twitter views. According to Brandwatch, Nike was mentioned 194,000 times online after running the ad, nearly 470 per cent higher than usual.[14] The success of the win and subsequent ad led to the Women's jersey outselling any other soccer jersey, men's or women's, ever on the company's website in one season.[15]

There are a few things to note here. Adidas was the official sponsor of the Women's World Cup, but it is Nike that we remember. Ad awareness for Nike increased 15 per cent from the start of the tournament, and Adidas decreased 7 per cent.[16] Nike created two different versions, win or lose, because they saw the value of this moment as a cultural milestone. They were not selling a product. They were not selling a specific athlete. They were connecting their brand emotionally to the values and diversity of this generation. Obviously, our institutions are not the same as a company like Nike, but this type of values statement is what Gen Z looks for from us.

Top of mind for Gen Z is racial, gender and income equality, as well as environmental issues (see Figure 1): 55 per cent of Gen Z have attended Black Lives Matter protests,[17] in stark contrast to 45 per cent of Baby Boomers who say that we have done enough for Black people's equal rights[18]; 73 per cent of Gen Z feel favourable towards brands that speak out against racism as opposed to 39 per cent of Gen X and Baby Boomers.[19]

In 2020, 78 per cent of Gen Z said that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on their world view.[21]

This is a higher percentage than mass shootings, the 2008 recession or President Trump's election. COVID-19 is a worldwide trauma that has disrupted the status quo in so many ways. The world will not be the same, and Gen Z will make sure of it.

There is a distinct difference with Gen Z and their relationship to service and volunteering.

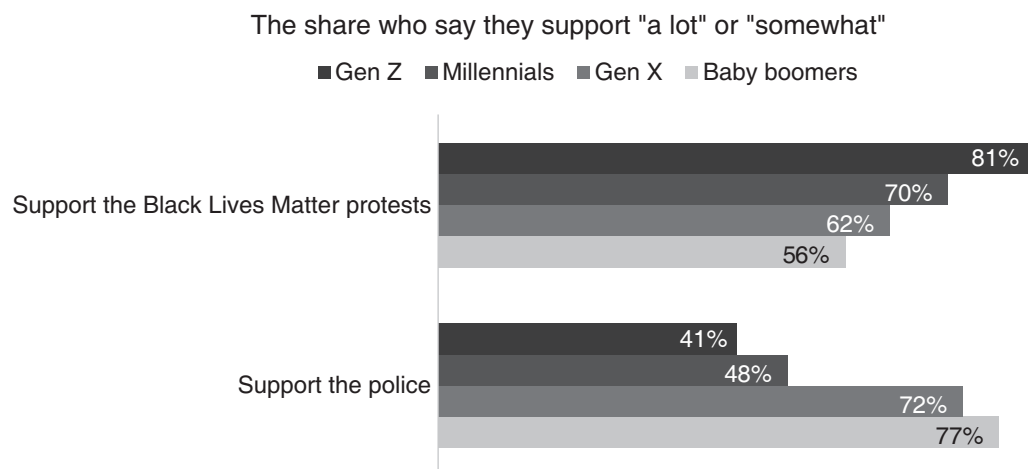They do not want to just serve a need; they want to solve a problem. Growing up during such tumultuous times has

The share who say they support "a lot" or "somewhat"

■ Gen Z ■ Millennials ■ Gen X ■ Baby boomers

Support the Black Lives Matter protests
- 81%
- 70%
- 62%
- 56%

Support the police
- 41%
- 48%
- 72%
- 77%

FIGURE 1 Gen Z is notably more likely than older generations to support the Black Lives Matter protests[20]

forced them to be political well before they are old enough to vote. This highly developed social conscience, combined with their pragmatism and optimism, creates a special constellation of beliefs and motivations that is unique to Gen Z.

Marketing applications

In the past, it has been easy and safe to let our statistics and data tell our stories. That does not resonate with this generation in the same ways. We have to appeal to their desire to do good in the world. Like Nike's example, connecting our work and mission to the values or identities that this generation believes in can be very powerful. At UC Davis, we have taken a university-wide stance on a range of issues, including solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement, legislative changes to Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), support for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual+ community (LGBTQIA)+ students and much more.

We know Gen Z wants to act now, so we need to show them that our universities can be the vehicle for them to make the changes they are so eager to make in the world. It is a key piece to recruiting them and convincing them to stay.

Case study: Basic Needs Center

In 2018, the Division of Student Affairs created a retention initiative specifically for students struggling to meet their basic needs. We know that when students are food insecure or worry about affording a safe and stable place to live, they can experience higher mental health distress and are much more likely to suffer academically. Creating a Basic Needs Center in the heart of campus with its doors open to anyone shows our commitment to serving all students' basic needs in the areas of food security, housing, mental health and financial literacy.

Equity and access in these four areas are important to Gen Z, and our work in marketing the centre aims to remove any barriers to accessing service: stigma, lack of awareness or lack of trust. In our work to combat the stigma, we specifically highlight the high level of student volunteers and campus partner participation. We also make sure that our language focuses on opportunity, not deficit. SAMC created the branding, logo and marketing materials for both students and donors. We even helped design the physical space, ensuring it was inviting to students and put the 24-hour crisis text line and suicide prevention hotline as a large decal on the wall so that students do not even need to go into the centre if they need help.

This continues to be one of our top marketing priorities, especially as our students are experiencing the financial and emotional effects of COVID-19.

AUTHENTICITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Building trust and credibility is paramount with this generation. They insist on authenticity and transparency and want to see that reflected in our communications. When it comes to Gen Z:

- Eighty-two per cent trust recommendations from friends over all else.[22]
- Fifty-two per cent of Gen Z trust influencers they follow on social media for advice about products or brands.[23]
- Seventy-seven per cent prefer to see real-looking people (vs celebrities) in ads.[24]

Looking to the business sector again, Sephora provides a good example of how to use Gen Z's insistence on authenticity and preference for reality. Their use of real people as micro- and macroinfluencers has established their authority as beauty experts, leading to tremendous growth on their social media channels as well as billions of dollars in revenue.

Sephora offers content creators free products in exchange for video reviews and make-up tips.

A Google search shows over 6 million hits for the search term 'Sephora hacks'. It is authentic and relatable. It is also something that we can do to highlight our programmes and services, leveraging real student testimonials, videos and endorsements.

This demand for authenticity and transparency does not stop at our marketing. Gen Z wants to know an organisation's story, purpose and impact to see if its values line up with their own. In a higher education setting, this plays out as an insistence on transparency in administration. They want to know where their money is going and how it is being spent. They want to know what boards administrators serve on. They want to know how big decisions are made, and they want a seat at the table.

They also want transparency from the companies that we bring to our career fairs and employer events. They want transparency about everything from corporate sponsors to the budget for mental health counsellors. They want to know why, and they are not afraid to exercise free speech and protest to get answers.

Marketing applications

Knowing this, the experience we promise must match the experience students receive when they use our services. We can be aspirational in our marketing but not to the point that it is unrealistic. As prospective students, they are excited and impressed by viewbooks, but step two is finding the 'real' UC Davis on YouTube. That is why we need to use real student stories wherever possible to cocreate a shared brand experience in an authentic way.

Once they become students, if they feel like you lied to them, trust and credibility will be lost. As this is something we already struggle to maintain, it will be harder to retain them. Additionally, that could be exponentially compounded by last year's NACAC's changes to its code of ethics, allowing students to be easily poached.

With that in mind, we also need to act quickly in terms of issues or crisis management. There is already a lack of trust, and delays on our part, however legitimate, are perceived as calculated. To counter this, we have created a series of crisis templates for use in a variety of circumstances that have been preapproved by our Vice Chancellor. This allows us to immediately move forwards without a series of reviews for the creative, saving us time and allowing us to be nimble.

Case study: First of Many

The Division of Student Affairs has made concerted efforts to retain our most at-risk students, who are disproportionately underrepresented minority students. They are often first-generation college students from low-income households. At UC Davis, 46 per cent of our undergraduate population are first-generation college students. In partnership with our Educational Opportunity Program, SAMC created a large-scale campaign designed to empower first-gen students, to help students name what they might

consider a deficit into a positive. We called this campaign '1st of Many'.

Knowing Gen Z's demand for authenticity, we centred the campaign around sharing personal stories of current students to show the many and diverse ways first-gen students are owning their first-gen status. Examples include, 'I'm the 1st in my family to work in a psychology research lab,' and 'I'm the 1st in my family to pursue music composition at a university'.

Custom photography captured the students in their element, donning a lab coat and safety goggles or poring over a music notebook. We placed subjects in front of a plain, warm textured background so they could shine.

We also worked with the community to define 1st of Many as 'An innovator; a student who blazes a path and leads the way for others; a member of their family's first generation to earn a bachelor's degree from a U.S. university'.

This campaign took form in a lot of the usual ways: social media, LCD screens, websites, branded shirts and posters. The programme was able to rally behind the campaign graphics and integrate them into event programming and swag like lapel pins for graduating seniors. Additionally, we designed umbrellas to use at the tables outside of the building that houses the programme as a public display of pride and solidarity with first-gen students. They also work symbolically to say to the whole campus, 'First-gen students belong here'.

For retention, it was critical to show that while they may be the first in their family to blaze the path to college, there is a community of so many others at UC Davis who have been in their shoes. In partnership with undergraduate education, the campaign has grown to include faculty and staff, who can wear their 1st of Many lapel pins and opt to be listed in a public directory of faculty who were first-generation college students and have made themselves available to mentor undergraduates now living that experience. By focusing on the achievements of first-generation students and connecting them with others — including relatable faculty mentors — through expression of a shared experience, the 1st of Many campaigns has been highly successful in helping to build a sense of pride and community in being a first-generation college student.

MOBILE AND SOCIAL NATIVES

Members of Generation Z are the definition of mobile and social natives. The oldest Gen Z kids were ten when the iPhone came out. It is important to note, they do not call them smartphones, like maybe some of us do, they just call them phones. That is all they have ever known. For previous generations, getting a car was one of the biggest moments of their young lives, and now it is getting a phone.

Gen Z has always had social media. The oldest Gen Z kids were six when Friendster launched, seven for MySpace and eight when Facebook launched. This generation has very little memory, if any at all, of a time before a tiny computer was in their pocket, with access to everything and everyone.

Gen Z are connected more than previous generations: 55 per cent use their phones 5 or more hours a day, and 26 per cent use their phones 10 or more hours a day.[25] There is also an important statistic that often is misrepresented about Gen Z: They have an average attention span of 8 seconds.[26] That does not mean they cannot pay attention for more than 8 seconds. Videos over 10 minutes are actually the most popular on YouTube right now.

What this statistic means is that they take less than 8 seconds to decide if content is worth their time or not. It is instant prioritisation as they bounce between five tech platforms or devices at a time.

Always being connected has its downsides: 70 per cent display symptoms of emotional distress when kept from their personal electronic devices,[27] and 40 per cent would rather have working Wi-Fi than working bathrooms.[28]

Being mobile and social natives means their language of choice is video. In fact, Facebook estimates that by this year, 78 per cent of all mobile data will be video.[29] Right now, YouTube is the second largest search engine, with over 500 hours of video uploaded every minute.[30]

They are using multiple social media platforms in different ways to meet very specific needs.

- On Snapchat, the most heavily used platform for Gen Z, they share real-life moments.
- On Instagram, they showcase their aspirational selves.
- On TikTok, they follow trends and consume entertainment.
- On YouTube, they are watching content previous generations got through broadcast television.
- On Twitter, they get the news.
- On Facebook, they keep in touch with older relatives, they buy and sell things, and they use the groups, Messenger and events features.

Marketing applications

If we are not communicating to them in their language, then it does not matter what we are saying.

We need to be social- and mobile-first with all other channels delivering a consistent, seamless experience.

We also need to move video from afterthought to first thought. For some high-profile videos, production value is important, but the majority of our videos can be recorded on phones or over Zoom, depending on individual needs, budget and resources. At UC Davis, we created a how-to guide for our partners to create effective videos using Zoom recording. This arose as a direct need during the pandemic, but we created it to be a permanent resource.

We also need to have an editorial calendar and a promotional plan. We can make the best videos or plan the greatest events in the world, have the best retention services, but if we do not work to build an active community across our channels, no one is going to see it.

Poorly managed social media accounts can even negatively impact our reputation with Gen Z, so it is important to know what our resources are capable of handling well. This may mean that you need to downsize the number of social channels you are managing to focus on a better experience on your flagship channels. For us, we did a full social media audit and met with every department and unit in the Division of Student Affairs to discuss their channels and recommend changes.

Case study: Digital-First

With all of our market research and student feedback, we looked at our own communications channels for current students and implemented a less-is-more strategy to maximise our resources.

After careful consideration, we sunsetted our Twitter account to double down our Instagram and Facebook efforts. Even though we had 2,500 followers on Twitter, we were never going to be able to use the platform in the ways our audience

expects without a dedicated news and media team. By making this decision, we were able to reallocate all of the staff time that was going to Twitter into Instagram and Facebook. Over the last year since implementing this new approach, we have grown our Facebook following by 40 per cent and our Instagram by nearly 50 per cent, all while delivering content better suited to our Gen Z audience.

Looking at e-mail communications, we took our less-is-more approach to our monthly, all-student newsletter and rebuilt from the ground up with Gen Z in mind. After focus groups and audience polling, we reduced the content of the newsletter by more than 50 per cent, knowing that Gen Z is not going to read an endless scroll. Our content is structured and placed in the design by hierarchy.

In this model, we choose one feature story to lead the newsletter, followed by a highly curated events section. We then have two to three subarticles, each with a two-paragraph maximum, and four small billboard ads, which link out to partner webpages.

This new approach has been successful. We average a 70 per cent monthly open rate, which accounts for more than 20,000 students, as opposed to a 60 per cent open rate average before this change. This means that we are reaching more students using the same tool, promoting resources and services critical for academic and social retention efforts.

COLLEGE IS NOT A GIVEN

With everything we have discussed so far, it is not surprising that Gen Z also has a different perspective on traditional higher education. Seventy-five per cent of Gen Z say there are other ways of getting a good education besides going to college.[31] They have learned through digital technologies their whole lives, so they believe they can learn from nontraditional sources and succeed.

One example is a gap year programme called Year On, formerly known as UnCollege. It consists of 10–13-week immersive learning experiences, also called 'micro-learning', which can mean travel, volunteer, an internship or even a community college class. When one experience is over, the participant can take what they have learned and then decide the next step — in a new direction, with a different company, or even in a new location if desired.

This style of iterative learning is in stark contrast to the traditional college model where a student declares a major early on and studies exclusively in one area for four years. To a traditional-age college student, knowing what they want to invest the next four years in seems daunting, maybe even impossible. It can also feel like a huge hurdle to getting out into the world and making an impact.

The economy also plays a huge role in their view of college. Education costs are going up and families' salaries are not growing fast enough to cover those costs. Since 2000, average student debt in the United States has increased by 76 per cent.[32] It is also important to note that students of colour are more likely to take on student debt and disproportionately struggle to pay it back at higher rates than their white counterparts.[33] Gen Z grew up watching Millennials start their careers burdened with student debt. The idea of this much debt makes it hard to convince them that college is worth it (see Table 2).

Additionally, the weak job market during and after the recession forced kids to start their own businesses instead of taking on a more typical entry-level job.

TABLE 2 Race and student debt outcomes across American cities[34]

Race and Student Debt Outcomes Across American Cities	
2.6×	A borrower in a majority–minority neighbourhood is 2.6 times more likely to fall behind
4.2×	A borrower in a 75 per cent-minority neighbourhood is 4.2 times more likely to fall behind
5.0×	A borrower in a 90 per cent-minority neighbourhood is 5.0 times more likely to fall behind

As of 2015, only 34 per cent of US teens were employed. Between 1950 and 2000, that rate was around 52 per cent. By 2024, this number is projected to go as low as 24.6 per cent.[35] They have effectively been pushed out of the traditional job market. Teens have turned to technology, more specifically, the internet to make money. This has all contributed to the rise in the gig economy, which is nearly half of the US workforce. It is not surprising to hear that 43 per cent of college students say they would rather be entrepreneurs than employees.[36]

Marketing applications

How do we show that college really is worth their money? How do we convince them that it is worth staying? We have to show them that it is not an either-or situation. Students can take classes towards their degree and have many learning opportunities outside of the classroom. With UC Davis' location in northern California, that includes research opportunities, internships in government and Silicon Valley and entrepreneur mentorship networks. We need to identify what doors our institutions can open to them by being a student and eventually a graduate.

As we know 43 per cent want to be their own boss, we need to emphasise how our institutions can help them become entrepreneurs. Tap into alumni success stories. Engage staff and faculty members with side hustles. Connect with leaders in your community. Leverage your internship and career centres. We have to show them that besides all the knowledge and experience they will gain with academics; they will also be gaining a professional network that they cannot get anywhere other than college.

Case Study: Internship and Career Center

Understanding that students are eager for learning experiences outside of the classroom, we knew it was important for them to know about all the opportunities the Internship and Career Center (ICC) has for them while they are in school. We assembled the ICC student employees to talk about their outreach tactics and worked with our students on what new direction we should take. Instead of focusing on the previous messaging of 'Look at what the ICC can do for you', we changed the focus to the student: 'Go Places'.

We launched this campaign with a postcard that speaks to any student, wherever they are on their journey. Whether they are a first-year student who is exploring what to do with their major, a second-year student looking for an on-campus job or a student looking for an internship, research opportunities or angel investors, it is not waiting until they graduate to find their calling but taking the next step on their individual journey.

On the back of the postcard, instead of including all the content the ICC previously used on their materials, we

pushed students to two digital outlets: their website and their new Handshake app. All content updates can be made on their website or app, which saves money on printing every year. In the content we did include, we gave high-level examples of how students can interact with the ICC during their time at UC Davis — to help give concrete examples of what students should ask about at the front desk or on the phone and to give a sense of the scope of services.

We have expanded on the Go Places campaign through LCDs and other digital deliverables, showing real students and people in aspirational situations.

CONCLUSION

Our ten years of experience working in retention marketing under various budgets and scope has served both the Division of Student Affairs and UC Davis as a whole. Benefits of this model include the following:

- Extended communications pipeline from prospective students to alums, allowing for consistent and seamless marketing and communications through all phases of the student journey.
- A unique, high-level perspective, bridging administration, students and academics, allowing us to break down silos, connect complementary efforts and enhance the student experience.
- Enhanced brand recognition and sense of belonging among target audiences.
- Greater organisational efficiency and less duplication of efforts and resources.
- Expert marketing support for academic and cocurricular retention services and resources.

To end, we will take a look at the three key things we have learned doing this work.

1. **Retention is as important as enrolment:**
   It is critical to break down silos by collaborating with campus partners, regardless of function, to ensure seamless communication from the university for prospective students through the entire process — from application to graduation. Also, look at the ways you are collecting data on marketing and its effect on retention, which can help you build a data funnel. With administrators, numbers often do the talking, so it is important to detail marketing metrics for service, centre and event promotion to see how that correlates to department and service usage data (swipes in our case). Once you understand that correlation, you can then begin connecting it to overall retention and graduation data, essentially allowing you to connect your marketing work to departmental impact on retention.

2. **We do not necessarily need new tools, just new strategies:**
   Look at your current tools through the lens of everything you have learned in this paper. It is time to reassess how you can use those tools for more impact without having to increase budget. For us, our Facebook groups are a free tool that we have reimagined to create a content channel that is segmented by audience class year. We have integrated our Google drive accounts into a collaborative tool to bridge silos across divisions. We created guides for recording videos in Zoom for our partners to make the jump into video for more things. Budgets are tight, but there are creative solutions in our own toolboxes just waiting to be discovered.

3. Gen Z leads with their values, so we should too:

In most cases, it is up to us to be the Gen Z advocate at the conference table. That means you need to connect with and understand the unique needs of our Gen Z audience. This can be as simple as hosting focus groups, conducting market research or even just reading more articles like this one. If members of Gen Z do not have a seat at the table, we need to use our position to ensure that we are always leading with and showcasing our university values. It is all about connecting our values to the work.

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