

Bakersfield College Reimagines Student Communications with CampusCommunicator

Financial aid professionals know that communications filled with industry jargon and unclear steps are problematic for students. Award letters and interactions with the financial aid office are often the first introductions students have to financial lingo, especially regarding paying for college and understanding aid offers. This knowledge gap makes it extremely difficult for students to successfully navigate the financial aid pipeline.

We sat down with the Bakersfield College financial aid team to discuss how their partnership with CampusLogic supports a reimagined pathway for students as they navigate the financial aid process.

Educating Students for Success

Bakersfield College's Director of Financial Aid, Jennifer Achan, had some words of wisdom during her Shift Summit session: "Part of our job is to educate our students about what they are doing, how much they are spending and what resources they have available."

When Achan first arrived at Bakersfield, they were seeing student default rates at around 32 percent. Students did not understand the financial aid choices they were making, and it was creating stressors that kept them from earning their degrees.

Students weren't the only group experiencing stress at Bakersfield, either. Before partnering with CampusLogic, the financial aid office was using a tedious, manual verification process that relied on paper documentation. The Bakersfield team realized there was an opportunity to make the financial aid process as seamless as the application process. They wanted students to focus on their education, not getting lost in a cumbersome financial aid experience.



The Solution: Connect with Students Through CampusCommunicator

Bakersfield initially onboarded StudentForms to offer students the ability to upload and access financial aid documents from anywhere, at any time. When the financial aid team realized the efficiencies this was creating; they began exploring other ways CampusLogic's Student Financial Success platform could streamline processes for students and staff alike.

Lysander Ramos, the Financial Aid Department Supervisor at Bakersfield College, has been impressed with how the institution is using CampusCommunicator to provide staff and student support.

From financial aid notifications to scholarship announcements, CampusCommunicator's text, video, and dynamic email templates drive better student understanding.

With CampusCommunicator, Bakersfield provides students 24/7 access to everything they need to make informed borrowing decisions. A cloud-based multimedia platform, CampusCommunicator integrates text, video and email templates that can be customized to deliver personalized communication.

Award Letters Designed for Students

Beyond updating a template that had not been changed in years, Bakersfield's team wanted to offer more information to students.

"The user interface is something we really wanted to improve for our students," Ramos said. "We wanted a way to guide students through it." With CampusCommunicator, the engagements sent to students now include dynamic explainer videos and personalized information about satisfactory academic progress.

Unlike the traditional award letter, students get information in real-time as they review their aid package. Bakersfield includes indicator points where students can hover over specific text like, 'What's the difference between direct and indirect cost?' to learn more. The goal was to give students a better insight into how much money they were receiving and what they needed to do to maintain those funds.

Doing More with Metrics

The more we know about the way students interact with financial aid information, the better we can meet their needs. Bakersfield uses the analytics available through CampusCommunicator to do just that. They noticed the average time students were opening communications was around 5 p.m.

That informed what times they hosted their FAFSA workshops, with the understanding that many students were also working and needed to access financial aid staff and resources outside of typical working hours.

Access to metrics also creates an opportunity to reach students when they are most likely to engage. According to Ramos, "Using analytics, we can learn better times of day to send information with a higher likelihood that students will actually read it."

It's helped them drive higher open rates, increasing 3% in the last year to a current open rate of 33 percent. That's visibility they simply did not have access to before going digital. Beyond this, the financial aid staff was pleasantly surprised to see that their students spend twice the amount of time engaging with their award letter communications as compared to the national average.

Helping Students Plan Smarter

Improving award letter processes for students was just the beginning at Bakersfield. "The advantage of CampusCommunicator is that it allows us to come up with great ideas," Ramos shared. "We can really be imaginative with what we offer students."

Empowered by CampusCommunicator and the variety of engagements offered, Bakersfield created a tool they call the Student Financial Aid Planner.

This financial planner gives students a custom roadmap that explains the types and amounts of aid available to them. Students can make more well-informed decisions and even see how adding credits or going full-time would impact their aid.