

Data-Driven Program Strategy Propels Regional College Growth

Service: Building from the Ground Up

The Challenge:

Building from the Ground Up

A private, four-year institution sought to secure its future by leveraging data to make informed decisions about its academic program offerings. The college wanted to identify which programs to invest in, how to best position them against their competition, and how to expand its market share.

The Solution: A comprehensive Program Prioritization and Positioning Analysis (P3) from RNL was executed in two phases.

Phase 1: Program Environmental Scan: Uncovering Realities of Their Market

We conducted a thorough environmental scan to learn exactly what was happening in the region around the college. We wanted to learn what the area's job market needed, demographic changes, and how tough the competition was. The scan included a snapshot of the regional economy, where graduates tended to find jobs, and how many similar programs were offered by their competitors.

What We Found:

The data gave us a critical, two-part picture:

1. The college's core programs were strong and a good fit for student interest. However, the local job market was contracting, and they couldn't rely on the same academic program mix or traditional student demographic base as they had in the past.
2. There is real opportunity to expand their program mix, program features, and delivery methods that would help them keep pace with what their market needed and grow their market share.

Our Recommendations:

1. Instead of offering only broad degrees, the college should create niche specializations, like adding an Agribusiness track, to match their unique strengths with specific, high-demand gaps in the market.
2. Develop online programs to reach a wider audience and tap into the demand for flexible education.
3. Create programs that align with the needs of adult learners because of the area's large, underserved market of adults who have "some college, no degree."
4. Research pricing sensitivities to ensure their tuition and aid packages were competitive with public and private institutions in their region.

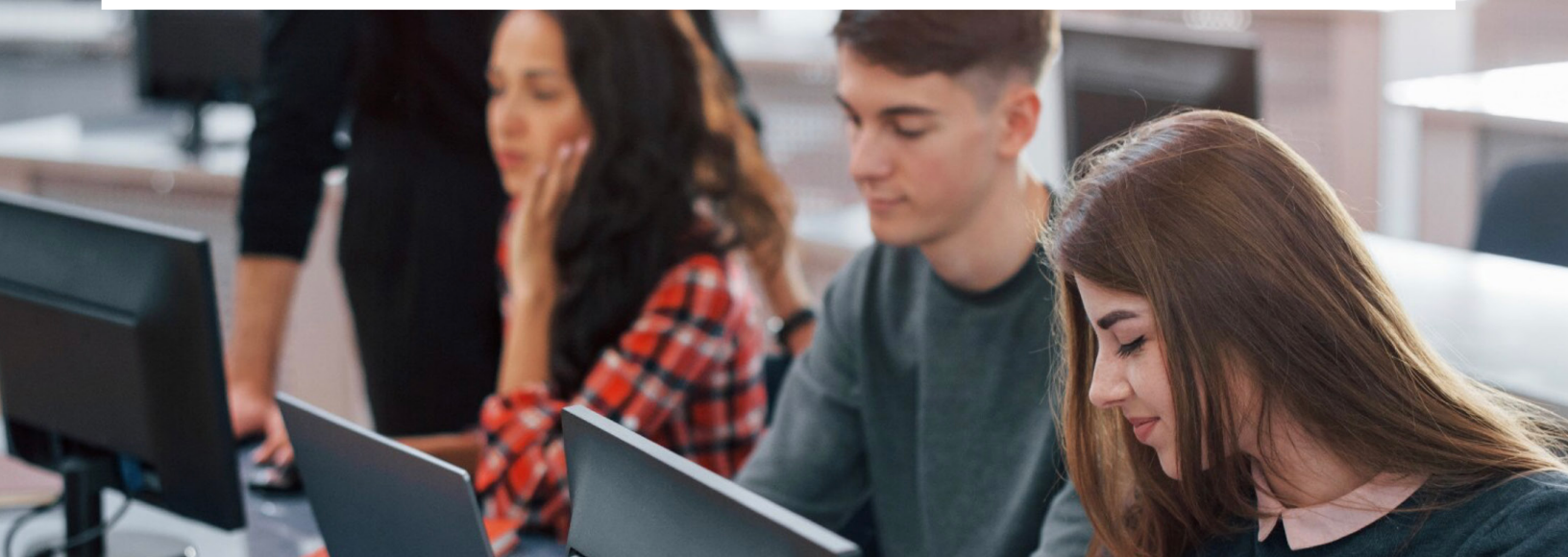
Phase 2: Competitor Analysis

After identifying which programs had the greatest market potential, the college had to figure out how they could make these programs stand out to prospective students. For this phase, the leadership selected five high-priority programs with student and labor market demand to focus on: Computer Science, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, Nursing, and Psychology. For each of the programs, we profiled four regional competitors to find out their weak spots and opportunities for our clients. The study delivered immediate, actionable recommendations on how to differentiate the four selected programs. For example, for the Computer Science program the study delivered four core strategies including:

1. **Launch Specializations:** Use concentrations (like Game Design or Information Security) to quickly add market-relevant fields of study without the time and cost of creating new degrees.
2. **Integrate micro-credentials and certificates directly into the major.** Students would graduate with both a degree and a professional certification, instantly boosting their value to employers by aligning degrees with in-demand skills.
3. **Offer online options and capitalize on the fact that all rivals only offer in-person programs.** Online or hybrid delivery would immediately capture the large, underserved market of students who need flexibility.
4. **Consider pursuing ABET Accreditation, a status held by only one competitor.** This external stamp of approval is a powerful marketing tool that instantly signals program quality and rigor.

Based on the clear, data-backed roadmap provided by the P3 analysis, the college moved confidently, transforming market data into a distinct competitive advantage. By strategically investing in niche specializations, pioneering flexible online delivery, and aggressively pursuing elite accreditation for key programs, the college will not only offset the effects of a shrinking local economy but also unlock powerful new growth markets in the adult and distance-learner populations while building upon existing strengths and identity.

This success story proves that the path to sustainable enrollment growth isn't about guesswork, but about leveraging market intelligence to align institutional strengths with verifiable student and employer demand.



Is your institution ready to stop guessing and start growing?

Contact us today to learn how a Program Prioritization and Positioning Analysis can secure your future.

