

CASE  
STUDY



# HAMPTON UNIVERSITY

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## THE CHALLENGE: GETTING STUDENTS ENROLLED

During the pandemic, college enrollment overall dropped by [over one million students](#) nationwide. At Hampton University, the effects were particularly acute. A report from the State Council for Higher Education found that enrollment in Virginia's historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) declined significantly during the pandemic, with Hampton losing over [700 students](#)—a number roughly equivalent to their entire freshman (*i.e.*, first year, first time) class in 2021.

Recovering from the pandemic and returning to prior levels of enrollment became a top priority for Hampton University. Its internal processes for reviewing applications, however, led to lengthy times for decisions and notifications of acceptance—giving prospective students more time to deposit elsewhere.

Part of the challenge was the manual process: The university relied on paper forms, with employees collating and filing hard copies of admissions materials. This was not only time-consuming for staff, but also kept applicants in the dark about their admissions process status, including whether the university had received all of their application materials. As a result, the admissions team spent time fielding phone calls from anxious students asking about the status of their applications. “In our community there is a ‘trust-but-verify’ mentality,” explained Angela Boyd, dean of admissions and assistant vice president for enrollment management. With 10,000 applications to process annually, the analog approach was not efficient for staff, nor did it provide the level of transparency that applicants sought.

The combination of these interconnected issue areas—pandemic enrollment, inefficient admissions processes, and the growing need for timely responses to applicant questions—led Hampton University to seek a solution that would streamline its processes, free up staff to interact with prospective and current students, and instill confidence in Hampton University.






## THE SOLUTION: STRUCTURED SUPPORT FOR INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Hampton University joined one of Ed Advancement's digital transformation cohorts in 2021, eager to address its enrollment process challenges. After seeking to understand the priorities and challenges facing the institution, Ed Advancement brought forward a range of solutions that could support the institution's enrollment objectives and help Hampton meet its strategic goals.

This collaborative approach was one the institution hadn't previously experienced. As Dean Boyd noted, "For somebody who's been in this business for almost 40 years, to have the resources presented to you in the manner that they were presented...it was very structured, very organized, very professional [...] To be able to do some things that you dreamed of doing, that was game changing for us."

By approaching the partnership as a shared problem-solving exercise, Ed Advancement was able to highlight high-quality potential solutions, and Hampton University chose the projects that would be both most feasible and most valuable — while also determining that some recommendations were less relevant. For example, the admissions team noted its existing internal strength in recruiting prospective students. Accordingly, the team chose to put its efforts with Ed Advancement in other areas and chose not to prioritize search optimization.

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**Angela Boyd** | Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions, Hampton

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Adopting a customer service management (CRM) system to improve the application and admissions process quickly emerged as the solution that could effectively solve for many of the challenges Hampton faced in enrollment management. CRMs can automate time-consuming practices like reminding new or prospective students of deadlines or sending regular updates on application status, freeing up staff time for higher-value, student-facing work. CRMs can also digitize manual processes, and connect otherwise siloed data sources, giving the admissions team the data it needs on each student as it supports them in real time. And CRM tools can help unlock insights on student activity, supporting more personalized interactions with students (like emails addressed directly to them, versus a template email). Hampton University leadership realized that improvements across each of those areas would enable it to provide the high-touch support it aspires to offer to incoming students.

Ed Advancement backed this initiative at Hampton University both with consultative support—including weekly strategy meetings with the implementing team to discuss the process—and with grants to support staffing. Additionally, Ed Advancement gave Hampton grants to fund both for a full-time position to support the CRM directly, as well as to augment Hampton's short staffed IT department.

The rollout was "transformational," according to Dean Boyd: The CRM implementation digitized the entire admissions process, meaning that employees no longer had to file, process, and load hard copies of admissions documents into the database. Students were able to submit digitally and track the progress of their application toward a final decision. The rollout increased communication with students significantly, allowing Hampton to connect students to events and groups of interest on campus. It reengineered



business processes: Employees had a new wealth of information about application and enrollment collected and available at their fingertips, allowing for more strategic decision-making and informing Hampton's visitation programs and special events.

At the same time, Hampton University partnered with Ed Advancement to roll out a new resource to keep students informed of key deadlines. This project helped the admissions team manage its influx of student inquiries as the CRM was installed on campus. The initiative allowed for text message reminders to students around registration deadlines, payment deadlines, and scheduling advising sessions. "Anytime you can have engagement with your student population, and you're sharing information with them in multiple facets, which is what Mainstay allowed us to do [...], it's helpful for us," according to Dean Boyd. The project has led to the permanent adoption of a chatbot on campus.

On the back of the CRM project, Hampton and Ed Advancement worked together to roll out a customer service workshop to staff, to streamline communications between staff and students and ensure that students have access to accurate, up-to-date information across departments. Currently, Ed Advancement and Hampton are working together to strengthen staff, student, and parent communication further through a digital engagement platform for admitted students and their families.

## **OUTCOMES: ACCELERATING ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT**

Through capacity-building with Ed Advancement, Hampton has launched meaningful initiatives that match the institution's broader excellence—kick-starting sustainable processes that Hampton can run independently in the long term.

Automating the admissions processes through Slate CRM meant that Hampton was able to get its class decisions out far more quickly than in the past. Dean Boyd believes that the increased efficiency in processing applications gave Hampton a competitive edge when it came to enrollment. The numbers bear this out—enrollment went up 29% after the adoption of the CRM.

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The increased transparency of a digital admissions process also brought notable time savings for staff, who no longer needed to field “constant” phone calls from students seeking updates on where they were in the admissions process. Additional time savings have come to staff through the chatbot model, which Hampton still uses on campus to instantly connect students to crucial information.

Last spring, the delayed rollout of the new FAFSA presented a significant threat to these incredible enrollment gains that new digital tools supported. Technical issues during the rollout of the new form (known as Better FAFSA) forced higher education institutions nationally to package financial aid in a very compressed timeline. Support from Ed Advancement enabled Hampton University to meet its immediate needs for packaging aid as well as to make the process adjustments (including configuring its student information system) that will set the institution up for success in years to come. Through this initiative, Hampton University is now able to share financial aid information with students more quickly—empowering them to make better decisions, and making it easier for them to commit to Hampton University.



After adopting the new CRM and other procedures, Dean Boyd says that Hampton reached its enrollment goal for Class of 2023 by May 1 for “the first time in [her] career.” The institution managed to enroll the class more quickly in part due to higher yield: the percentage of admitted students who choose to matriculate to Hampton has doubled since the pandemic.

The increasing application and enrollment rates continued for the class that enrolled in Fall 2024, even as the rollout of the new FAFSA form delayed financial aid packaging. Not only did the number of applicants rise significantly, up more than 30% compared to the year before, the institution’s success meant that it had to utilize a waitlist for the [first time in recent history](#).

“Hampton University’s partnership with Ed Advancement has been one of the most transformational collaborations in the history of the University, resulting in improved service excellence and more efficient operations,” President Williams shared. This efficiency will be useful in serving a growing student body: The 2024-2025 freshman class of nearly 1,300 students was more than double the size of the freshman class during the pandemic. “This marks a record rate of students committing to the University,” notes a Hampton [press release](#), “many of whom are making their decisions earlier than ever before.”

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**Darrell Williams** | President, Hampton University

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