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— CAIN, 2012

ARTICLE



## Considering Introverted and Extroverted Students

Successful recruiting and good admission counseling requires an understanding of the most effective communication methods for each individual student. Understanding introversion and extroversion can contribute to improving your communication skills and recruitment strategies. This article will explore the differences between introverts and extroverts and provide practical considerations for enrollment management professionals.

### INTROVERT AND EXTROVERT DEFINED

Introversion and extroversion is the first pair of psychological preferences on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. It is important to keep in mind that introversion and extroversion are two ends of a continuum, and individuals may fall closer to one end or somewhere in the middle. Depending on which study you consult, between one-third to one-half of Americans are introverts; however, some of them may act as if they are extroverts since our society encourages extroversion over introversion (Cain, 2012).

One of the main distinguishing features between introverts and extroverts is their source of energy. Introverts are energized by the internal world of ideas, emotions and impressions (Laney Olsen, 2002). They tend to conserve energy, and social interaction may leave them feeling fatigued. Extroverts, on the other hand, draw energy from the external world involving social interaction and experiences. They spend energy and are often under stimulated by too much time alone or in contemplation. Extroverts tend to be talkative and assertive and enjoy large social gatherings.

Another key difference between introverts and extroverts is their response to stimulation. Extroverts delight in having many experiences, while introverts enjoy understanding what they experience (Cain, 2012). Because introverts need to mentally process what's going on around them, they can become over stimulated by crowded places and a constant barrage of activity. In overwhelming situations, introverts will often observe for a few minutes to give



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— DARLENE DILLEY, DIRECTOR OF ADMISSION AT WESTMINSTER COLLEGE (UT)

them time to process their surroundings before fully engaging. Extroverts tend to want to hit the ground running and experience as much as they can as fast as they can. Whereas introverts like to have a few close friends and interact in small groups, extroverts enjoy having many casual friends and often consider people they've just met as friends.

## CUSTOMIZED ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS MADE SIMPLE

Introverts and extroverts also differ in their approach to knowledge. Essentially, introverts enjoy depth, while extroverts like breadth. Introverts like to dig deep into topics. They often underestimate their own knowledge base about certain subjects because they focus on how much more there is to learn about them. Conversely, extroverts usually enjoy a broader approach to topics. They like to know a little bit about several subjects rather than great depth about one.

These key differences between introverts and extroverts have significant implications for the recruitment process and admission counseling. In order to be an effective enrollment management professional, it is important to consider these crucial distinctions in your interactions with prospective students and in planning recruitment activities. Whereas with extroverts, admission counselors may want to briefly cover several admissions topics, with introverts they should consider providing greater detail on fewer subjects within each communication. Further, when planning recruitment events, it is important to provide a mix of activities that will appeal to both introverts and extroverts.

## COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS

Several stereotypes and misperceptions prevail about introverts and extroverts because many people do not have a strong understanding of what these two temperaments entail. As an enrollment professional, you need to be aware of these misperceptions in order to accurately understand and guide your prospective students. The most common myths about introverts and extroverts include the following:

### MYTH 1—Introverts are Shy.

One of the biggest misperceptions about introverts is that they are shy and do not like being around people, whereas extroverts are friendly and outgoing. In truth, introverts are not necessarily timid; they're quiet. And they are not aloof; they just tend to be more reserved. Further, since shyness indicates anxiety about social interaction, extroverts can actually exhibit as much shyness as introverts (Petrilli, 2012).

### MYTH 2—Extroversion is Superior to Introversion.

Western culture promotes the extrovert ideal: "the belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight" (Cain, 2012). Yet, though extraversion is considered socially advantageous in today's American culture, it is not always desirable particularly in academic settings. In fact, research



studies have found that introverts tend to be more academically successful in college than their extrovert counterparts (Entwistle, 2011; Entwistle & Wilson, 1970; Gallagher, 1996). Introverts are well known to have a special ability to focus on a subject and learn about it in great depth.

### **MYTH 3—Introversion is a Shortcoming.**

Being introverted isn't something that must be overcome. There are many positive aspects of introversion. Nevertheless, it can be misunderstood particularly if an introverted student does not understand his or her temperament. Therefore, it is important for admission counselors to help introverted students appreciate the many positive aspects of their nature and what they have to offer.

### **MYTH 4—Introverts Lack Social Skills, While Extroverts Excel Socially.**

Most introverts, like extroverts, have good social skills and enjoy spending time with people. They are often well liked and socially successful. However, parties and large group activities can deplete their energy; thus, introverts tend to enjoy smaller groups or one-on-one conversations. Conversely, not all extroverts are social experts. It is also important to note that a lack of social skills may magnify introversion or extroversion traits. While an introverted student who lacks social skills may appear disconnected and/or disinterested, an extrovert may dominate the conversation and be unaware of when to stop talking.

### **MYTH 5—Introverts Have Inferior Communication Skills.**

A common misperception of extroverts is that they have superior communication skills; however, in reality introverts and extroverts simply have different communication styles. Introverts do not talk just to talk. They think through thoughts and ideas internally first and then share them with others, whereas extroverts tend to think out loud and formulate ideas as they speak.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTROVERSION AND EXTROVERSION IN RECRUITING AND ADMISSION COUNSELING**

Introverts and extroverts are different in many ways, so as enrollment professionals, we need to understand where the student stands on the spectrum and to employ different strategies to successfully recruit introverts and extroverts. Thus, the following section provides recommended recruitment strategies and activities tailored to introverted and extroverted students.

### **IDENTIFY PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS' PREFERRED COMMUNICATION MEDIUM**

Prospective students often have a preferred communication medium in the recruitment process. This communication method is frequently based on whether the student is an introvert or extrovert and is directly related to how



the individual processes information. For instance, if an admission counselor were to ask a prospective student why he or she is interested in a particular academic area, an introvert may prefer to consider the question before responding, while the extrovert may have an immediate response. The medium used to communicate with students can facilitate effective communication and engagement when appropriately selected.

When it comes to communicating with admissions counselors, introverts often prefer written over oral communication, particularly when they do not yet know the counselor. Extroverts, on the other hand, often prefer oral communication. So, you will frequently find that introverts will prefer to communicate through email or text, while extroverts will often prefer to talk in person or on the phone.

However, it can be a challenge to understand prospective students' communication preferences early on in the recruitment cycle. To address this issue, Illinois College in Jacksonville developed an innovative technique to identify prospective student communication preferences. On the Illinois College inquiry form, one of the questions asked is: "Which of these is your preferred method of communication—phone, text or email?" With this simple question, potential students can self-identify their optimal method of communication with admission counselors early in the recruitment process. At Illinois College, 53% of inquirers indicated a preference for talking on mobile or home phones, while 47% indicated written communication preferences of email or text. Such a request for communication preference could also be added to the search response and application for admission.

## **BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS**

In college recruiting, it is important to build rapport and trust with your prospective students. You need to take the time to know each student's interests, needs, and personality and find effective ways to communicate with them. Understanding whether a prospective student tends to be more introverted or extroverted can help in the process of relationship building and, thus, increase the likelihood they will enroll.

The way prospective students communicate and behave can give you clues as to whether they are more introverted or extroverted. You will find that introverted students may have some difficulty with small talk, their body language indicates some discomfort, and they prefer to listen first. Extroverts, on the other hand, may appear very comfortable in conversation, enjoy talking about several different topics, appear at ease with new people, and prefer to talk rather than listen. Remember, extroverts process their thoughts by saying them aloud. Introverts need time to process information. Darlene Dilley, Director of Admission at Westminster College (UT) cautions:

"Don't misinterpret introversion as a sign of indifference or lack of interest, and conversely, don't be overconfident that extroverts will enroll. I've worked with many students whom I thought were not too interested because they didn't want to talk on the phone, respond to email immediately or didn't express



interest in getting involved in a bunch of campus activities, but who had a passion for the school and enrolled.”

Building a relationship based on trust is important with all prospective students. Introverts form very strong bonds of trust, but it often takes longer to build the relationship. With the more introverted student, once you gain their trust, you may find they will form a deep connection with you and your institution. Initially, it may be easier to build relationships with extroverted students as they tend to make connections with people more easily. However, you may find relationships with extroverted students to be less deep than those with introverts.

Through conversations and questions with students, you can learn about their specific interests and passions and cultivate a relationship. In phone conversations, interviews, campus tours and meetings with faculty it is, therefore, essential to use open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are effective for both types of communicators, just in different ways. With the introvert, you can use open-ended questions to draw the student into the conversation. They need to be asked for their opinions and ideas as they rarely volunteer their depth of knowledge. In addition, introverts like to reflect, think and process information internally before responding to a situation, so you may need to be patient and wait several seconds for their answer.

For extroverted students, you can use open-ended questions to steer the conversation. It is sometimes difficult for extroverts to focus on the topic at hand. The extroverted student may lead you off on a tangent. As Dilley notes, with extroverts “you might end up talking about music and concerts the entire visit, rather than about the college. Now, that’s great for relationship-building, but the student might leave knowing nothing more about the college other than the director is a concert fanatic who’s seen Los Lobos six times!” So, as you talk with extroverted students, you should use open-ended questions to direct the conversation and achieve the purpose of the conversation.

## DEVELOP EFFECTIVE TELEPHONE STRATEGIES

There may be times you need to call an introverted student, even if this is not their preferred method of communication. In such instances, attempt to keep phone calls brief, regular and directed rather than longwinded, variable and infrequent. Also, give them the option to communicate their follow-up questions or requests for additional information in writing.

In addition, since introverts tend to prefer to observe a situation before engaging in it, admission counselors can help them prepare for success by strategizing ahead of time. A conversation about what to expect on a college visit or from an interview along with suggestions on what kinds of questions to ask could help prevent an overwhelming situation for the introverted student.

Extroverts, on the other hand, may make the conversation long and unfocused. Therefore, it is important to guide them back to the reason for the call. It is fine to talk about other topics and help build a relationship, just make sure your goals are achieved in the phone call.



## CREATE AN OPTIMAL INTERVIEW ENVIRONMENT

When interviewing a prospective student you suspect to be introverted, you may wish to speak with the student first without a parent in the room. Parents can often take over the interview, particularly with introverted students. When parents are present, answer their questions, but continue focusing your questions directly to the student.

Encourage introverted students to tell you about their major interests, career goals, and what they are looking for in a college. You can also prompt them by asking open-ended questions. When asking a student a question, pause and give them time to think and respond. Introverts in particular need time to think about their responses. If you put them on the spot, they will not be as likely to give you as good an answer as when you give them a minute to think about their response.

## PERSONALIZE THE CAMPUS VISIT

It is widely known that the campus visit is one of the most effective ways to get a student to apply and enroll. So, planning successful campus visits is a particularly important recruiting activity. The most effective campus visits are those that allow for flexibility and give students several elective activities. It is important to have several visit options for your prospective students to allow them to tailor their campus visits to their interests.

In planning the campus visit with a student, ask directed questions to tailor the visit to his or her individual interests and comfort level. It is true that many introverted students may be more interested in one-on-one visits with faculty and coaches; whereas, extroverted students may enjoy sitting in on a class or attending a large campus event with current students. However, do not assume what their interests will be. You may find an introverted student actually prefers to join a group rather than having a private meeting with faculty or an advisor. So be sure to ask about each student's specific interests and goals of the visit. In addition, tour guides and student ambassadors should also be trained to ask openended questions and to be sensitive to students' individual communication styles.

## CONSIDER INTROVERTS IN OVERNIGHT VISITS

Overnight visits can be intimidating for some introverted students. You can ease their potential concerns by having the host student connect to the prospective student on social media or by email in advance of the visit to begin to build familiarity before they will spend time together on campus. To make them comfortable on campus, considering having a structured setting where prospective students can first meet their overnight hosts face-to-face before joining a big group. As at an open house, you want to offer a variety of activities for the student to choose from that meet their individual comfort levels.



## PLAN OPEN HOUSES FOR INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS

When planning open houses, consider offering a mix of activities from which introverts and extroverts can self-select events that are of most interest or comfort to them. A careful mix of activities, such as student panels, academic forums and student activities fairs can be tailored to meet both introverts' and extroverts' needs and comfort levels.

Communicating in larger groups is often more challenging for introverts as they far prefer small group or one-on-one conversations. So, do not force your introverted prospective students into active participation in large group activities, public speaking or large group discussions. These types of activities can be disconcerting for introverts, and you want them to feel at ease at your open house. When you do have group activities, you can help introverted students feel more comfortable by providing specific rules and structure within the activity. In addition, providing positive feedback can help them gain confidence within the situation.

A student panel, in which current students talk about their college experience and answer prospective student questions, is a great open house activity. If you plan a student panel, consider the option of questions being submitted in writing—on cards or by text message—and subsequently read aloud by a moderator for your introverted students. You can also provide a list of sample questions to the group to help introverts think about and formulate their own questions. This strategy actually helps both introverted and extroverted students think ahead of time about appropriate and useful questions to ask current students. Academic and student activities fairs are great forums for both introverted and extroverted students since they allow introverts to listen to other student questions and answers they receive, which gives them time to formulate their own questions and comments. For extroverts, they offer a great forum to verbally engage with faculty and student leaders. Since introverts generally like to digest information, you may wish to distribute handouts with detailed information each student club and organization. This strategy allows introverted students the time to learn about each group and make an informed decision about which club or organization they may wish to join. Also, prepare your faculty and current students about topics they should focus on if approached by students who may not have questions initially. College professors are disproportionately introverted, so they will likely appreciate the preparation themselves.

Then, following your open house, send students a survey and ask for specific feedback on activities. Follow-up surveys are a great way to get a good pulse on student perceptions and comfort level with the event and it may help you get more feedback from your introverted students.

Understanding the positive aspects that introverts and extroverts bring to the enrollment process will help you become a more effective communicator as well as help prospective students make good college decisions. Enrollment professionals should be aware of the myths surrounding these temperaments and understand the true nature of introversion and extroversion in order to



most effectively build relationships with prospective students and guide them in the college search. Additionally, it is important to tailor your recruitment activities to meet the needs, interests and comfort levels of both introverted and extroverted prospective students with a careful mix of activities from which students can self-select. Being mindful of the nature of introverts and extroverts will not only help students make thoughtful college decisions, but also aid you in reaching your enrollment goals.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Kathleen M. Cross, Ph.D.**

Kathleen Cross, Ph.D. serves as Executive Vice President of KelmscottEDU, a nationally recognized higher education enrollment consulting and marketing firm, where she leads consulting, strategy, and marketing. With experience working in both U.S. and international universities, Kathleen is a former Vice President of Enrollment, Chief Technology Officer, and Dean of Studies Abroad.

Serving 500+ higher education institutions over the years, Kathleen's approach is to create authentic experiences that engage and inspire the audience combined with innovative and proven data-driven strategy.

Kathleen holds a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration from Saint Louis University along with a bachelor's degree from Saint Louis University and master's degrees from the University of Cincinnati and California State University. Kathleen also serves as a professor in the Higher Education Administration Graduate Program at Bay Path University. She is a frequent national speaker and published author.

She has additional experience in corporate and healthcare organizations as a former bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist and former director and part-owner of successful medical device/technology company. She has lived in several countries and fluent or proficient in multiple languages.

### **Stephanie E. Chipman, M.A.**

Ms. Chipman serves as Vice President for Enrollment Management and College Marketing at Illinois College (IL). Chipman earned her BS and MA from the University of Evansville (IN) and San Diego State University (CA) while studying Communication. Her 15 years in higher education include work at her almae matres, Harlaxton College (UK) and Butler University (IN). She is an introvert and regularly presents at conferences and in classrooms on the topic.