

# Finances Driving Affordable College Search Far Afield

**Business Courier - by Dan Monk**

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They are casting a wider net, colleges and students alike, as the economy and the Internet change the rules of the college recruitment process.

“We’re getting a ton of mail,” said **Mark Canterna**, whose daughter is a senior at Cooper High School in Union, Ky. This is the second college search process for Canterna, whose oldest daughter now attends the University of Kentucky.

Canterna said more schools are contacting his daughter this time around, and she’ll apply to more schools. He expects she’ll submit up to 10 applications, compared to the six submitted by daughter No. 1.

Finances are a big reason for the wider search. Canterna wants to make sure the search produces the best value.

“We have to think of the money,” he said. “We’re going to do everything we can to let my daughter go where she wants, within reason. The finances, I hate to say that’s the No. 1 determining factor. But there’s three or four up there that are kind of even.”

That’s a view **Dan Bisig** hears frequently from clients at College and Beyond LLC, an advisory firm that helps families through the college search process. Bisig said colleges have made it easier to apply online. There has been an explosion in the number of data-gathering tools to evaluate everything from class size to graduation rates to the amount of debt a student can expect to face on graduation.

Another factor is the common application, an online program that lets students fill out a single application accepted by hundreds of colleges.

“Students continue to apply to more colleges, partly because of the ease of using the common application and partly due to the need to find colleges that will potentially award them scholarships and grants to help lower the cost,” Bisig said.

The economy is influencing family decisions about college choices, Bisig said. But longer-term trends are an equal driving force. College tuition and fees have risen much faster than personal incomes for the last few decades, so families are finding college less affordable year after year. Students are expanding the search process, but they’re also more open to staying close to home. Parents are favoring schools with high four-year graduation rates.

“They’re figuring if we’re going to throw a bunch of money at college, we want our student to get in and get out as fast as possible,” Bisig said.

Colleges are also expanding their recruitment efforts. The University of Cincinnati, for example, has implemented two new programs that enable students in Northern Kentucky and Southeast Indiana to pay discounted out-of-state tuition at UC. The rates are \$10 per credit hour higher than

UC's in-state tuition and fees of \$10,065 per year.

"Our Northern Kentucky enrollment is up 50 percent" since the new policies took effect two years ago, said **Caroline Miller**, associate vice president for enrollment management at UC. "Southeastern Indiana enrollment is up 140 percent."

UC has dramatically increased campus visits by prospective students. For the fiscal year ended June 30, UC brought 7,198 students to campus. That's up from 5,800 a year ago and 4,900 two years prior.

And the school is devoting more resources to making it easier to find information on its website.

"Our strategy for the last several years has been to make sure our website is as strong as we can make it," Miller said. "We use the Web to bring students to campus. If they go to your site, and they can't find information or the information is outdated, it's a turn-off in the search process."

Miller said there is no question that students and parents are more interested in the "value proposition" than they were before the recession. They're comparing schools by cost and outcomes, seeking information on how many graduates get jobs upon graduation and what their starting salaries are.

Eduventures Inc., a Boston-based research firm, provides UC with survey data on the families that consider UC in the college-search process. For the class that entered UC in September, 49 percent said the economy impacted their college search process. One year earlier, the figure was less than 30 percent, Miller said.