



# REDEFINING STRATEGY

Using Partnerships to Expand Capacity



*Dee Steinle discusses navigating post-pandemic campus life with her admissions team.*

## THE IDEA IN BRIEF

Given the seemingly endless demands on their time, how can leaders do more than manage what's immediately in front of them? Where can leaders build in the time to innovate, to develop new solutions or simply to improve processes?

As management wizard Peter Drucker suggested almost 50 years ago, organizations should not require superhumans to run them, so the solution is likely not the development of new mutant powers. Effective, strategic partnerships can, however, give leaders something that might make them feel like a superhero: the additional bandwidth to build relationships with applicants through value-added engagements and the data and analysis tools that help to build stronger classes.

In the context of graduate management education (GME), most partnerships come in a few different varieties:

**ACADEMIC/UNIVERSITY:** These types of partnerships include accelerated degree programs like 3+1, STEM-based programs that lead to OPT extensions and other exchange-type arrangements that involve two or more schools/colleges.

**OPERATIONAL:** These partnerships focus on functions that can be “outsourced” without losing brand control, including accounting, finance, applications, document logistics, study abroad, clubs and organizations, feedback solicitation and a whole host of activities that can be completed at a lower cost, with less disruption, less effort and at a same-or-better quality than the school or unit can.

**AFFILIATION:** These types of partnerships focus on specific interests/identities and specialized areas of the industry; groups like the large and well-known GMAC and AACSB are augmented by a vast network of slightly-smaller groups like The Consortium, the Forte Foundation, Pro Hispanica, the MBA Roundtable and the EMBA Council, to name a few.

## THE IDEA IN PRACTICE

### Overview

Dee Steinle, Executive Director of MBA and MSB Programs at the University of Kansas (KU) School of Business, faced a common managerial challenge. She was asked to walk the proverbial tightrope — grow enrollment without additional resources. In the highly competitive marketplace for GME, overall enrollment has been fairly static while the number of offerings has dramatically increased. Enrolling a class of MBA students who have the chance to improve rankings has become so competitive, in fact, that some schools have started offering their degrees at zero cost to attract top students. Steinle needed to determine how to grow enrollment in a rapidly changing environment, and do so without any additional resources.

About 30 minutes away from downtown Kansas City, the School of Business at the University of Kansas (KU) sits on an idyllic campus with historic red-roofed buildings reminiscent of a medieval European village. KU is a public R1 university — a classification of the Carnegie Foundation that ranks KU as an institution with the highest possible research activity — with a total enrollment around **20,000 students**. The School of Business has a more modest enrollment of fewer than **800 graduate students**, and it takes great pride in the strong community fostered by a smaller program.

### A CASE STUDY

As she was walking to her office on the last day of final exams for Q1 one fall afternoon, a student approached Dee Steinle, Executive Director of MBA and MSB Programs at the University of Kansas (KU) School of Business, and said, “I’m making an app like Tinder, but exclusively for paleontologists; I’m calling it ‘Carbon Dating.’” Steinle found herself still laughing as she sat down at her desk moments later. It’s not uncommon for students to form quick relationships with Steinle. With an optimism that takes the form of an easy smile and the patience of a monk, Steinle often tells students that she would have been a paleontologist if she weren’t a dean. “Carbon dating,” Steinle chuckled as she logged onto her computer to a strategic planning template she was completing. Widely seen as an enrollment Jedi, Steinle was spending a lot of time finessing the phrasing in her “Enrollment Goals” section. Of course, enrollment targets are growth targets, but Steinle knew enrollment would be more of a challenge that year because she had to confront the perennial problem of doing more with less. Without significant resources available in time or staffing, she needed to find a way to meet the growth goals that the school increasingly relied upon to support their innovation and community building efforts.

For almost 100 years, the School of Business at KU has been offering graduate management education (GME) that emphasizes practical application and exposure to leading researchers. Today, the School of Business offers a balanced portfolio of programs with a multi-platform MBA and four MS degrees. Cohorts are kept small to focus intensively on the classroom and case method dynamics, and in the School’s well-regarded FTMBA

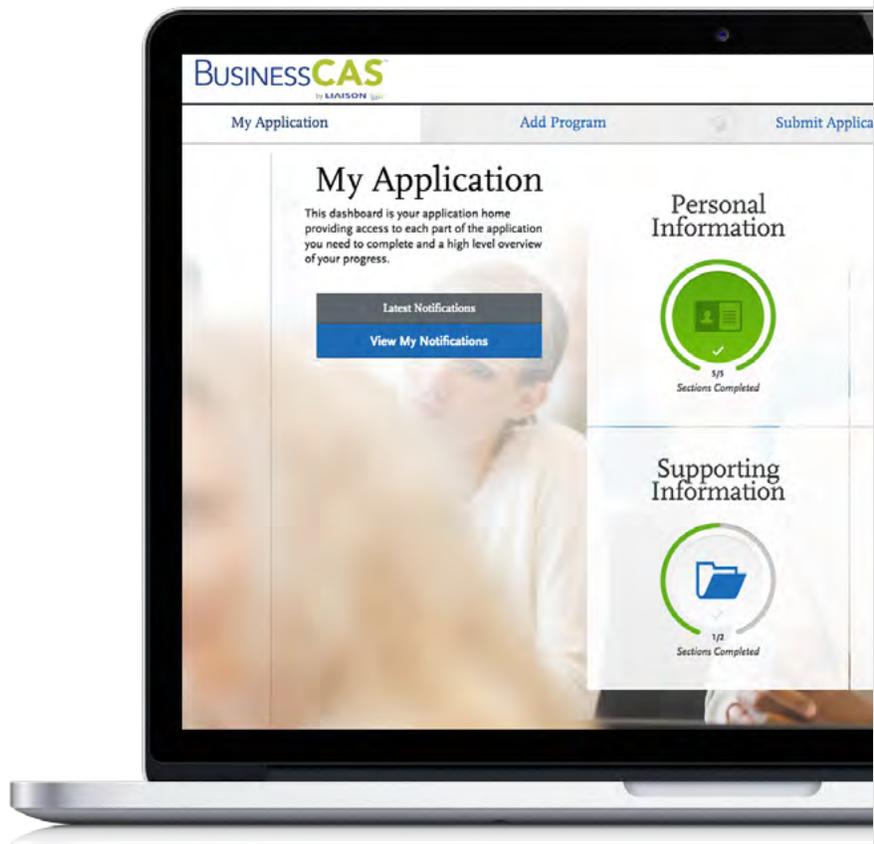


program, students and grads alike consistently give the school high marks across all of the rankings surveys.

At KU, enrollment in the FT MBA program has long been targeted to a class size of 40, but like many schools in the late 2010s, enrollment in the FT MBA program has become increasingly harder to predict. High competition among schools for applicants with rankings- and employment-friendly profiles has long been *de rigueur* for MBA programs, but the rise in quality and number of international competitors, a complex and sometimes challenging US student immigration system and a dramatic shift in program cost dynamics paired with escalating scholarship competition has had a chilling effect on the FT MBA enrollment at the majority of schools. KU was certainly not immune to these challenges, and as such, the year-over-year application-to-enrollment yield at most schools was a tense roller coaster for leaders like Steinle.

Ultimately, Steinle needed to forge new partnerships to tackle these enrollment challenges. A natural mentor and connector, Steinle has a widely-acknowledged talent for leading her team by example and producing consistent positive results. Her excellence as a leader has afforded her the opportunity to contribute to the broader GME field through leadership service with some of the most important organizations in the field, such as GMAC. In one of these industry positions, Steinle was part of a committee that evaluated the concept of a centralized application tool. Years after this committee service concluded, a colleague who served with her introduced her to the leading Centralized Application Service (CAS™) for GME, BusinessCAS™. Steinle led KU to adopt the BusinessCAS solution for the 2019 cycle, and results took shape quickly.

With BusinessCAS filling the gaps in recruitment, KU's graduate business programs went from an application-to-enrollment yield that slipped to 40% in 2018 to a yield of 70% in 2020, a remarkable increase. During the same period, the program went from enrolling as few as 25 students in 2018 to an expanded cohort of 45 in 2020. A partnership with BusinessCAS translated into a no-cost solution



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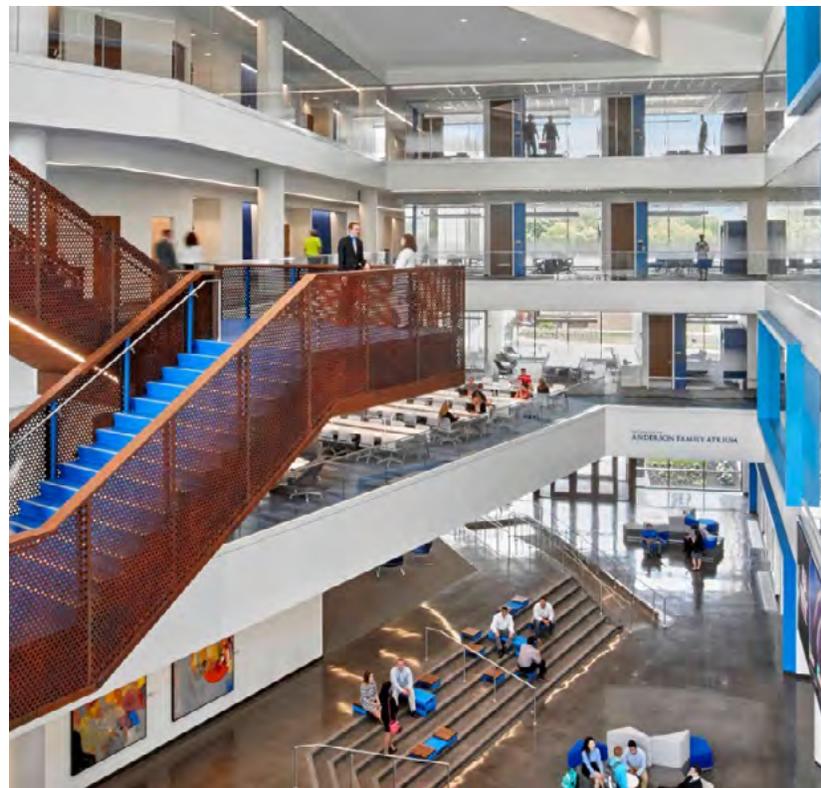
to Steinle’s enrollment challenges, and when asked to reflect on her success, Dee observed, “Because of BusinessCAS and some strategic partnerships, we are getting better quality applications. It is not about more applications, but better applicants.” Explaining how she has approached enrollment planning in the current environment, she noted, “BusinessCAS has been part of [our] strategy” to adjust for the disruption of international applicants this year by finding new pipelines for domestic students.

In an environment where relationships drive enrollment, leaders are often frustrated that admissions staff sometimes spend the majority of their days managing applications. By comprehensively managing the application process through BusinessCAS, Steinle’s admissions team can focus on building relationships with applicants and finding the value-added engagements that help to build a strong class.

Further, BusinessCAS provides additional channels for lead generation, broadening the top of the funnel

without any new marketing costs, which was key to Steinle’s enrollment growth under budget constraints. Ultimately, BusinessCAS also helped to improve the quality of the class by providing Steinle with the data and analysis tools to not just find great students, but to find *more* great students.

BusinessCAS, it turns out, is not only a solution for many enrollment challenges — traditional and current — but also a community; one where leaders like Steinle come together to share best practices and work together to solve common problems. By seeking out innovative partners who understood the unique challenges of her institution, Steinle found a way to not only improve and stabilize her enrollment, but also to buck the current industry trend where many schools have a highly volatile enrollment outlook.



## WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE WITH THE BUSINESSCAS COMMUNITY BEHIND YOU?



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