

When **Social Media** Isn't Social Enough

Tom Kephart, Director of Admissions
St. Clair County Community College

Deirdre Musser, Transfer Admissions Counselor
Concordia University Ann Arbor

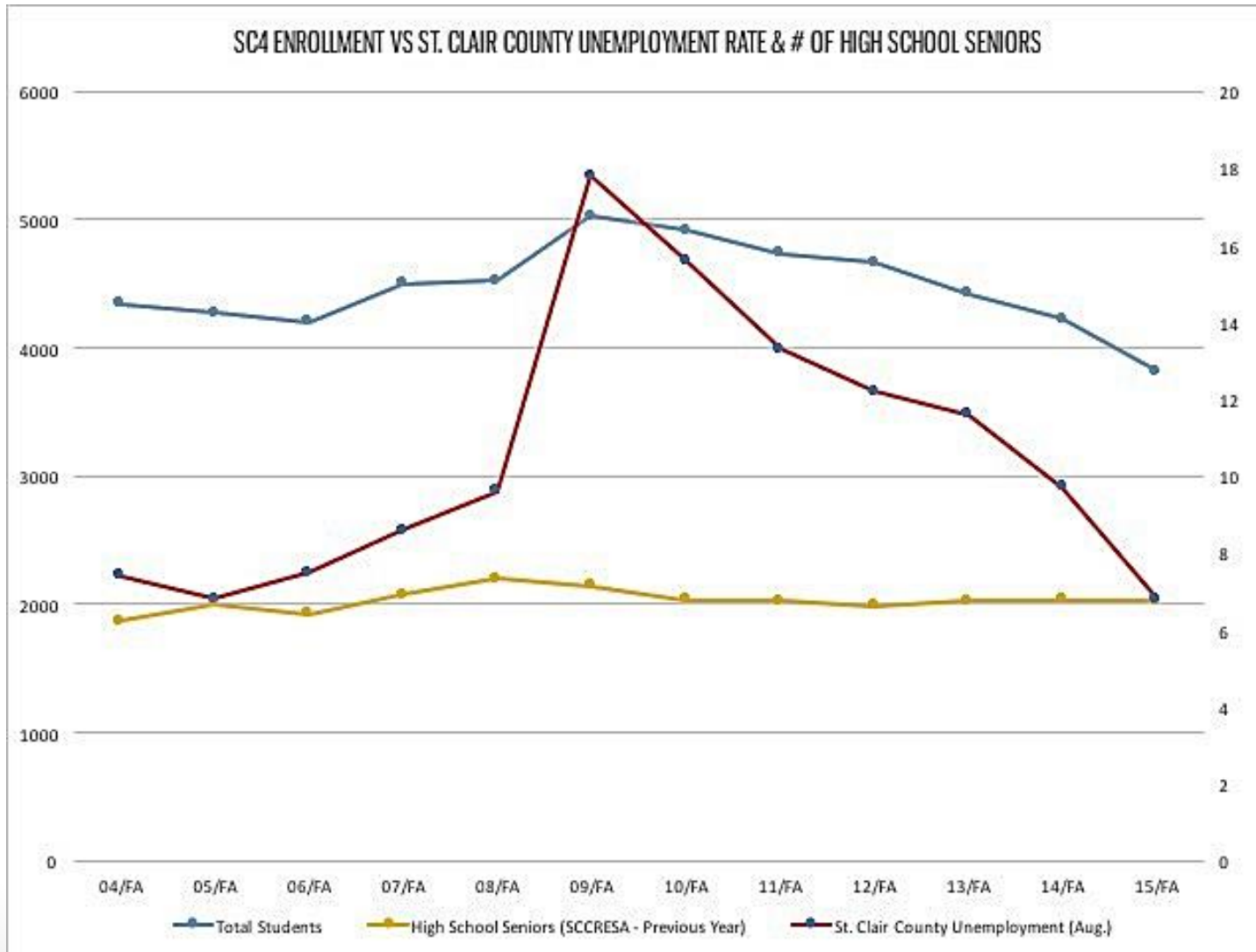
Cheerleading!



Changes at SC4...

- Slow, long-term decline in overall headcount since 2009
 - **Fewer traditional high school seniors** due to demographics and also early college programs
 - Decline in population isn't extreme, but is a **steady trend downward**.
 - **Early college programs** have been great for students – **and** the college – but it moved students out of the traditional recruitment pipeline.
 - **A big peak in enrollment in 2009** was due to the Great Recession. Federal and state funding for retraining inflated our enrollment numbers.
 - As employment recovered (from 18% to nearly 4%), **non-traditional student population dried up**.

...leading to peaks and valleys

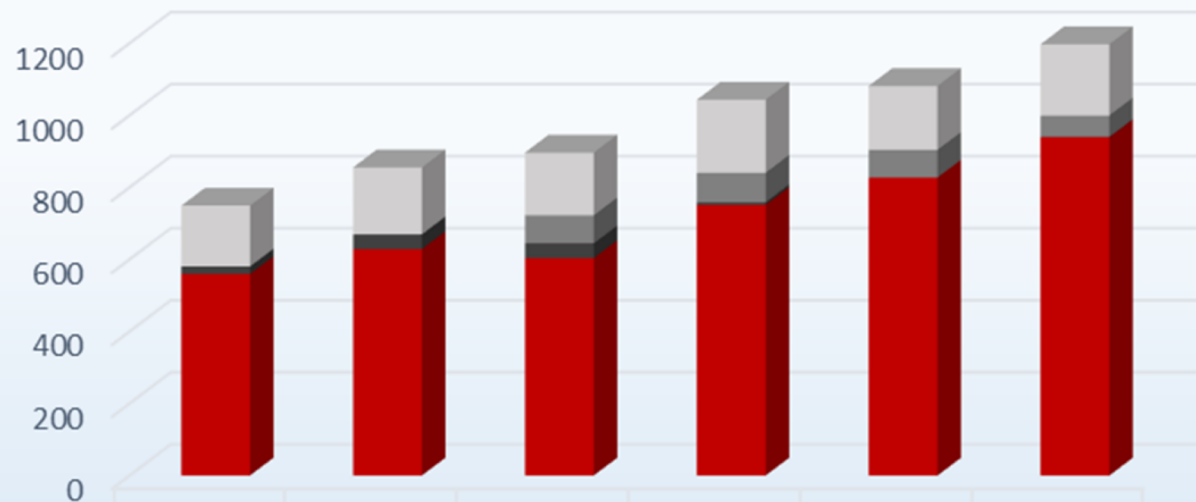


Changes at Concordia...

- Prior to 2013 CUAA had not seen much growth and totaled at around 500-600 students.
- We were not well known in the Ann Arbor area or beyond.
- The university was on the verge of closing its doors when the President of Concordia University Wisconsin proposed a merger.
- Since the merger was made final in 2013 we went from a total of 749 to a record enrollment of 1,197 this fall.
- This story is not consistent at other similar private universities.

... jump start a comeback

CUAA Fall Census Enrollment Trend



	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
Graduate/Professional	169	186	174	203	177	198
High School Dual Credit			78	82	77	59
Accelerated Undergraduate	21	41	41	7		1
Traditional Undergraduate	559	628	603	751	827	939

■ Traditional Undergraduate ■ Accelerated Undergraduate
■ High School Dual Credit ■ Graduate/Professional

Changing demographics

- SC4's share of traditional graduates also declined.
 - In 2011, **55.1% of St. Clair County high school seniors** who chose to go to college decided to attend a community college – SC4.
 - In 2015, that number had reversed: **Only 46.2%** were choosing to attend a community college after high school.
- Our large feeder schools were even more dramatic:
 - 102 Port Huron Northern grads attended SC4 in 2011; **in 2015 it had fallen to 69** (43.4% of all college-goers)
 - 105 St. Clair High School grads attended SC4 in 2011; **in 2015 it had fallen to 65 in 2015** (45.8% of all college-goers)

Why?

- Difficult to pin down, but some educated guesses include:
 - **Improved economy** – students and parents are more comfortable with shouldering the cost of going directly to a four-year college or university
 - Advent of the **dedicated college advisor** (such as the MSU CAC program) – students may be receiving different advice from these advisors
 - But most importantly... **a lack of dedicated recruitment efforts at SC4**
 - Recruitment and contact with high school counselors was handled on a “time available” basis by our academic advisors
 - In a practical sense, “time available” turned out to be extremely limited
 - Relationships – and opportunities – were lost

Bucking the trends

- Why is CUAA growing?
- New programs that align with the jobs that need to be filled in our current economic climate.
- Nursing has been integral in our growth and our edge in promoting our other Healthcare programs.
- New athletic teams added along with new facilities
- Our mission became a consistent message across the campus after the merger and was engrained in a new set of faculty and staff
- We reached out unapologetically

There is no Facebook bandage

- In 2014 and 2015, SC4 began using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on a limited basis.
- In 2016, a Social Media Coordinator was hired to manage expanded use of those platforms.
- Engagement was improving, but didn't have a noticeable effect on enrollment.
- So... in **April 2016**, we began a major review of marketing and recruitment data and processes at SC4, looking for ideas on how to reverse the decline.
- We made a **commitment to active recruitment**. The college hired a Director of Admissions along with a two full-time Admissions Representatives and a part-time Recruitment Projects assistant.

Facebook, unique? What?

- We have been focusing on what we are doing that can be promoted on social media instead of what we can post on social media
- Is the community seeing our campus as involved or just online?
- What can we do to involve our students, community, faculty, and staff in our social media posts?
- Cross campus social media – connecting the various pages from departments
- Examples: High school band awards, choir/band concerts, athletic events, tournaments

Identify your advantages



- Our “open door” mandate can be both a strength and a challenge – but in either case we have to **get students to come through the door!**
- Historically, SC4 has been reluctant to discuss tuition rates in our marketing, fearing that potential students might perceive us as “cheap.”
- But refusing to discuss the cost of education, especially in today’s environment, **forfeits our biggest advantage.**



- We know we are **not cheap** which is a big challenge and can push student away once they hear “private.”
- By offering **multiple scholarship options** it opens the door for students and provides a greater opportunity for them to be involved.
- By taking the time to **speak with students** and help them understand what their options are it seems a lot less scary.

What do SC4 students think?

- Focus groups were conducted in August and September of 2016, with a broad range of students: traditional, non-traditional, early college, and personal enrichment.
- **78%** said the **quality of SC4's faculty** was a “very important” or “somewhat important” reason they chose SC4.
- **65%** said **class size** was “very important” or “somewhat important”
- **71%** said **tuition costs** were a “very important” reason they chose SC4, with **another 18%** saying it was “somewhat important.”
- **Campus life**, by contrast, was important to only **37%** of students.

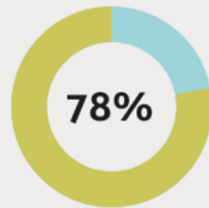
What do CUAA students think?

CUAA Satisfaction exceeds National Averages for:

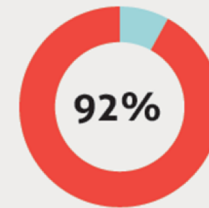
- ✓ College met expectations
- ✓ Would enroll here again
- ✓ Overall satisfaction

*What OUR
STUDENTS Say*

*What OUR
GRADS Say*



78% of 2018 graduates agreed that Concordia helped them better understand their **calling and purpose in life**



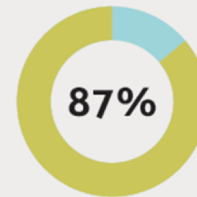
92% of 2018 graduates agreed that Concordia provided a **positive environment for learning, living, and personal growth**



86% of 2018 graduates feel better prepared both to serve and to lead by **putting the needs of others first**



78% of 2018 graduates indicated they **grew in their Christian faith** during their time at CUAA



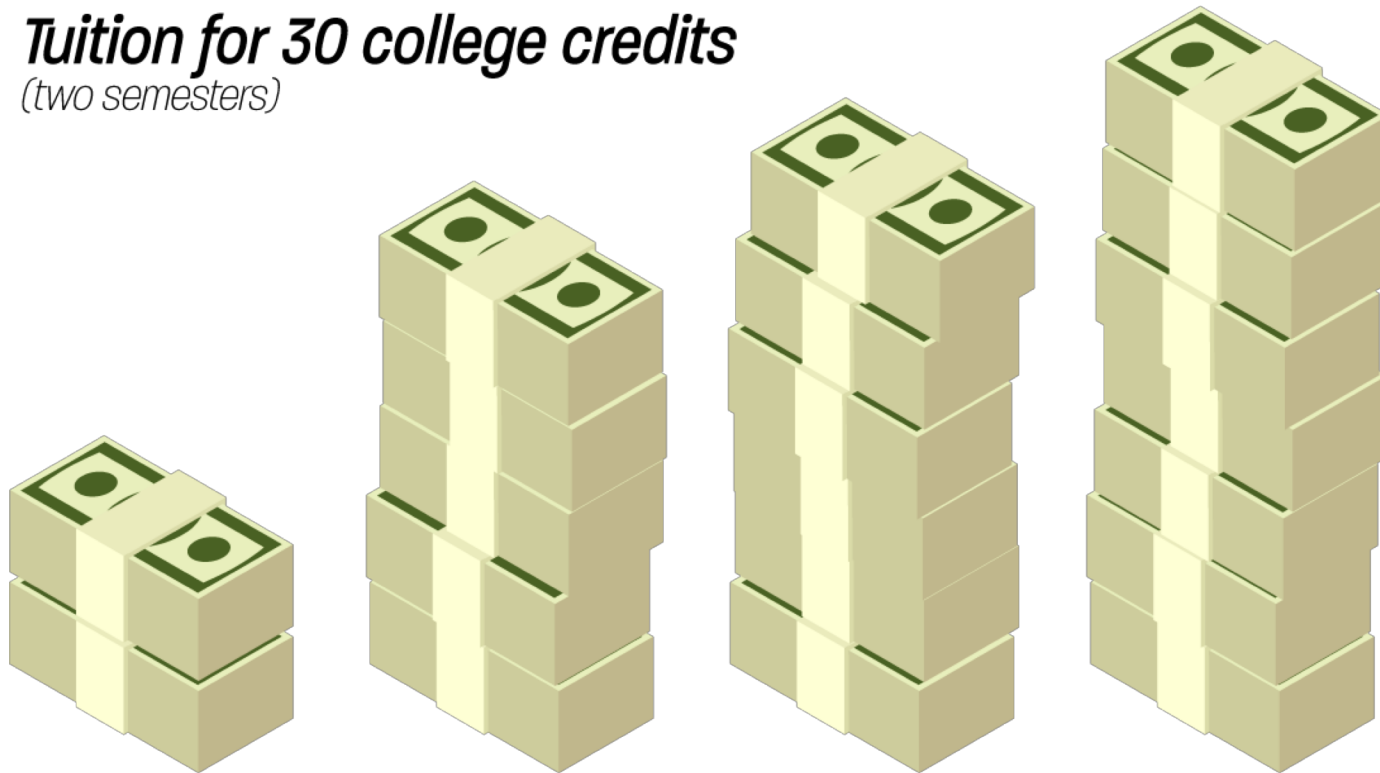
87% of 2018 graduates felt that **faculty and staff demonstrated they personally cared**

Our “refresh” is paying off

The services, programs, faculty, staff, events, and many other adds have helped us to go beyond the surface level

Finances matter, but...

Tuition for 30 college credits
(two semesters)



SC4
\$4,260

Wayne State
\$11,542

Central Michigan
\$12,150

Michigan State
\$14,522

Tuition only - does not include fees, room and board, or other expenses

...it's more than money

- It's about **VALUE**.
- SC4 has outstanding, experienced, student-centered **professors and instructors**, many of whom have worked in the fields they teach.
- Overcoming the “not as good” and “won't transfer” stigma requires explaining the overall value proposition to students who are often first-generation and have no previous knowledge about higher education options.
- **Students deserve a quality education that fits their needs. Informed decisions are key, whether they choose to start close to home at a community college or go directly to a public or private four-year institution.**

Purpose bigger than price

- It can be a huge challenge to prove the value of a CUAA education when the only item that parents and students are paying attention to is the sticker price
- The facts of the university are important but emulating the experience that students will get throughout the recruitment and admissions process is vital
- Our campus Pastor knows every students' name and is involved in their daily lives
- We do not require student to sign a statement of faith but we provide the resources they need to explore their faith and find their true calling
- Requiring certain courses to be take only at CUAA that explore a student calling or vocation

Guiding principles



- We are **always recruiting**.
- Everyone is a potential recruiter.*
- **All marketing** is recruitment related.
- Our **website** is the hub of our online messaging.
- We focus on the **social media platforms** and **communications methods** most used by our students.
- We create and share **relevant content**.
- We work to **develop and maintain positive relationships** with high school and home school teachers, counselors, and administrators.

** or can undo the good work of a recruiter with a single comment!*

Start early – Don't assume

- Begin communicating with **high school juniors** – and even earlier – much sooner in their selection process
- Need to have **your school in their minds** long before they're starting to choose from four-year options
- Continue to work with **middle school** and **upper elementary** groups to visit campus and participate in events designed for them
- Assume that **all** prospective students need help figuring out how to start college. Avoid scaring them away with details. Stop recruiting backwards!

Always be thorough

- From an admission counselor perspective it can get extremely repetitive talking with students and parents but we need to remember to:
 - Take the time to explain
 - Go over every detail
 - Use simple language
 - Be approachable and open so that students and parents can come to you with anything they need
 - Develop different ways to explain things based upon the student that you are working with to cater to their needs
 - Help the student prepare for their time at your institution
 - Provide them all the resources you can

Make friends in all places (and on campus)

- When schools ask for help for an event – **not** just College Month and **not** just applications- or financial aid-related – the answer is “YES.”
- Work with schools **outside of the SC4 district** but not part of any other community college district.
- Consider **rebates or establish on-campus housing** for out-of-district students.
- Create and **encourage advocacy** on behalf of the college in K-12, homeschoolers, and the broader community.
- Assist other faculty/staff with their departmental events
- Always ask for cross campus representatives to be present
- Show your appreciation and say thank you! It’s the little things!

SC4's results

FALL	STUDENTS	% CHANGE
2014	4,225	-4.4
2015	3,817	-9.7
2016	3,715	-3.0
2017	3,725	0.0
2018	3,611	-2.9

Change from Fall 2014 to Fall 2016 = **-12.1%**

Change from Fall 2016 to Fall 2018 = **-2.8%**

Final thoughts

- It **doesn't** happen overnight.
- **Stop** doing things that aren't effective, just because you've "always done them."
- **Stop** doing things others do that aren't effective, just because they're "expected."
- **Don't guess.** Get the data you need to make **informed enrollment management decisions.**
- Let your plan stay in "**permanent draft**" mode. Things always change; your plan should, too.
- Be adaptable!!!!
- **Doing nothing is not an option.**

Questions?

