

**Start here.
Go anywhere.**

St. Clair County Community College

Carrie Bearss

Registrar

Tom Kephart

Director of Recruitment, Career & Testing Services

Once upon a time...

A mighty band of adventurers set out to find the Grail, beset by unimaginable and inhuman horrors, including:

- Declining enrollment
- Uncertain local and state funding, and...
- A dragon

The Grail was the legendary “Five Percent Growth” that all brave admissions and enrollment knights doth seek.

This is their story...

<https://youtu.be/L9nXfffeAIU?t=30s>

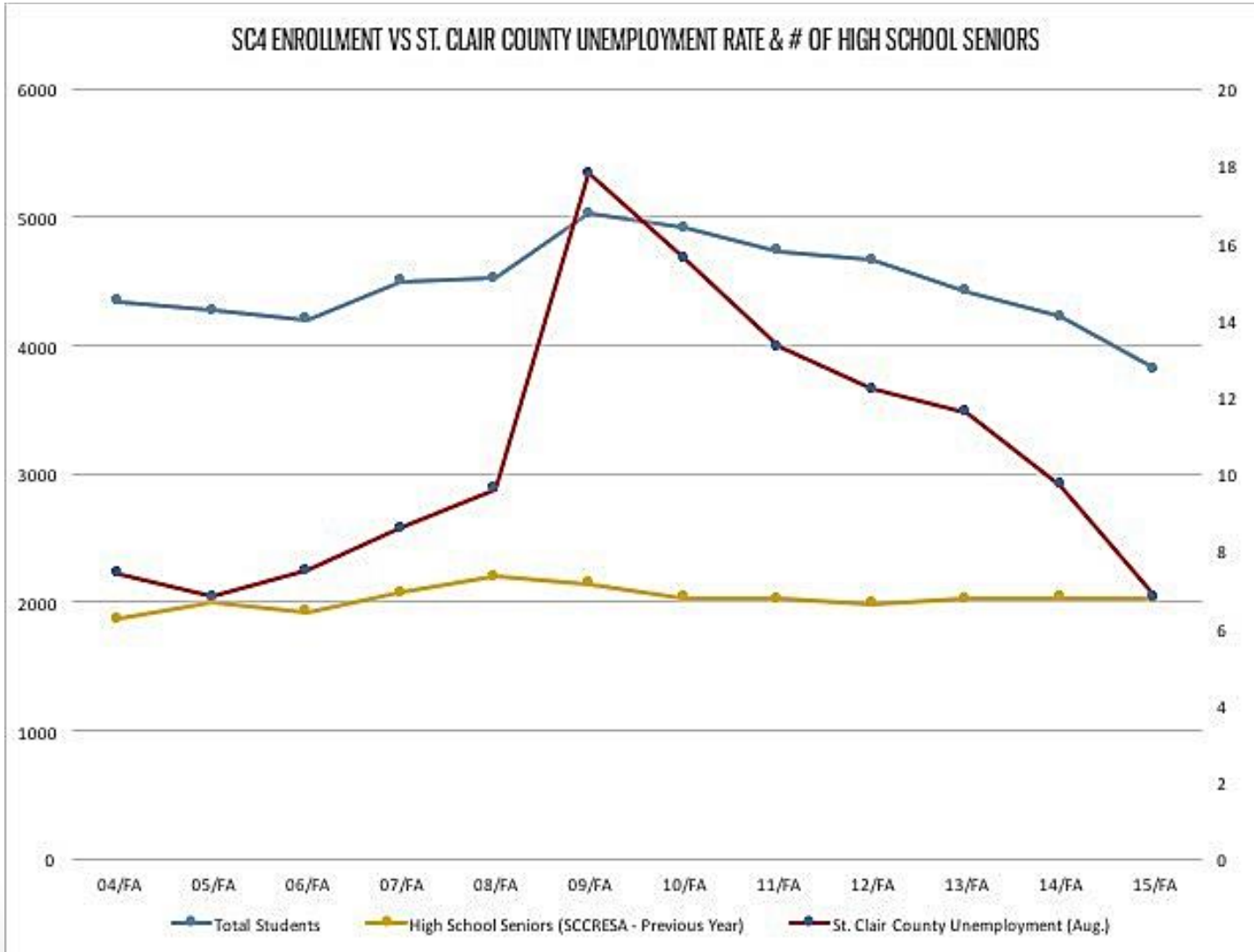


A familiar story

- 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** has been great for students – **and** the college – but it did move students out of the recruitment pipeline before they normally would have started college.
 - **Big peak in enrollment in 2009** due to the Great Recession. Federal and state funding for retraining inflated our enrollment numbers.
 - As employment recovered (from 18% to around 5%), **non-traditional student population dried up**.



A familiar picture



Drama and intrigue

- SC4's share of traditional graduates has declined as well, though.
 - From 2011-14, **53% 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 47%** were choosing to attend a community college after high school.
 - Our large feeder schools were even more dramatic:
 - Port Huron Northern averaged 93 grads attending SC4 from 2011-14; **in 2015 it had fallen to 69** (44% of all college-goers)
 - St. Clair High School went from 85 per year on average to **only 62 in 2015** (45% 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
 - A **move away from dedicated recruitment** efforts by 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



So the quest begins!

- In **April 2016**, we begin reviewing data and processes at SC4, looking for ideas on how to reverse the decline.
- New SC4 president **Deborah Snyder** encouraged the effort, suggesting that we don't have time to do things in "dog years" anymore. **Agility and implementation** are critical.
- Made a **commitment to active recruitment**. Hired a Director of Recruitment along with a full-time Admissions Representative and part-time Recruitment Projects staff.
- Since we'd been above **4,000** students as recently as fall of 2014, we chose that number as our initial goal. Going from 3,800 to 4,000 would be a **5%** increase from fall 2015 to fall 2016.




Sharpening our swords

- We began **reviewing our marketing and public relations efforts**, working with a consultant to identify problem areas in our communications with students, parents, counselors, teachers and the community.
- Development of a **long-term comprehensive recruitment plan** was started. A “permanent draft” version of this plan was completed in August, only six weeks after initiation. (Much more on this later.)
- Marketing significantly expanded our use of **social media and web-driven advertising** and search engine marketing.



Plugging the holes

- Since the efforts to re-establish recruitment and direct marketing began in June, we also needed to do some **stopgap approaches** to try to increase Fall 2016 enrollment
 - Traditional phone and email contacts through Registrar's Office and Financial Aid were redoubled, reaching out to not just last year's students who hadn't yet registered, but also the previous year's students, plus those who had expressed an interest in SC4 on either their ACT or FAFSA forms.
 - Plenty of calls, emails and postage. Hours of work. **Was the Grail in sight?** At times you could see it, glowing in the distance.
 - And in the end...? 



-2%





The journey of a
thousand miles
begins with
a single step.

- Laozi, 5th century BCE



No short term fix

- As wise Laozi suggested 2,500 years ago (so he should know about longevity), solving a problem like recruitment **doesn't happen overnight** – but it **can** be solved.
- 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.**



Time out! Mission control

- Who believes in the mission of your community college?
- **What is that mission?** (We love pop quizzes at SC4!)
- What **advantages do we offer students** at a community college that our colleagues at four-year colleges and universities can't match?
- If we believe in those missions, and we can define the advantages, **why don't students make the obvious choice** and attend their local community college?
- Are we telling the **wrong story**? Are we telling an **incomplete story**? Are we telling it in an **ineffective manner**?



What do 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 students think?

- “Mostly money and I know classes transfer.”
- “Instructors come from the real world.”
- “Saved me a lot of money on general education courses.”
- “Didn’t know what I wanted to do, better to take classes here and figure it out than spend a lot of money somewhere else.”
- “Proximity to home versus four-year schools.”
- “The Blue Water Middle College.”
- “Close to home, I’m still able to work.”
- “TACO COUPONS BABY. ITS TACO DAY.”



**Tuition costs for
30 college credits**

**Michigan Transfer Agreement
or
General Education
Requirements**



**Wayne
State
University**

**Central
Michigan
University**

**Michigan
State
University**

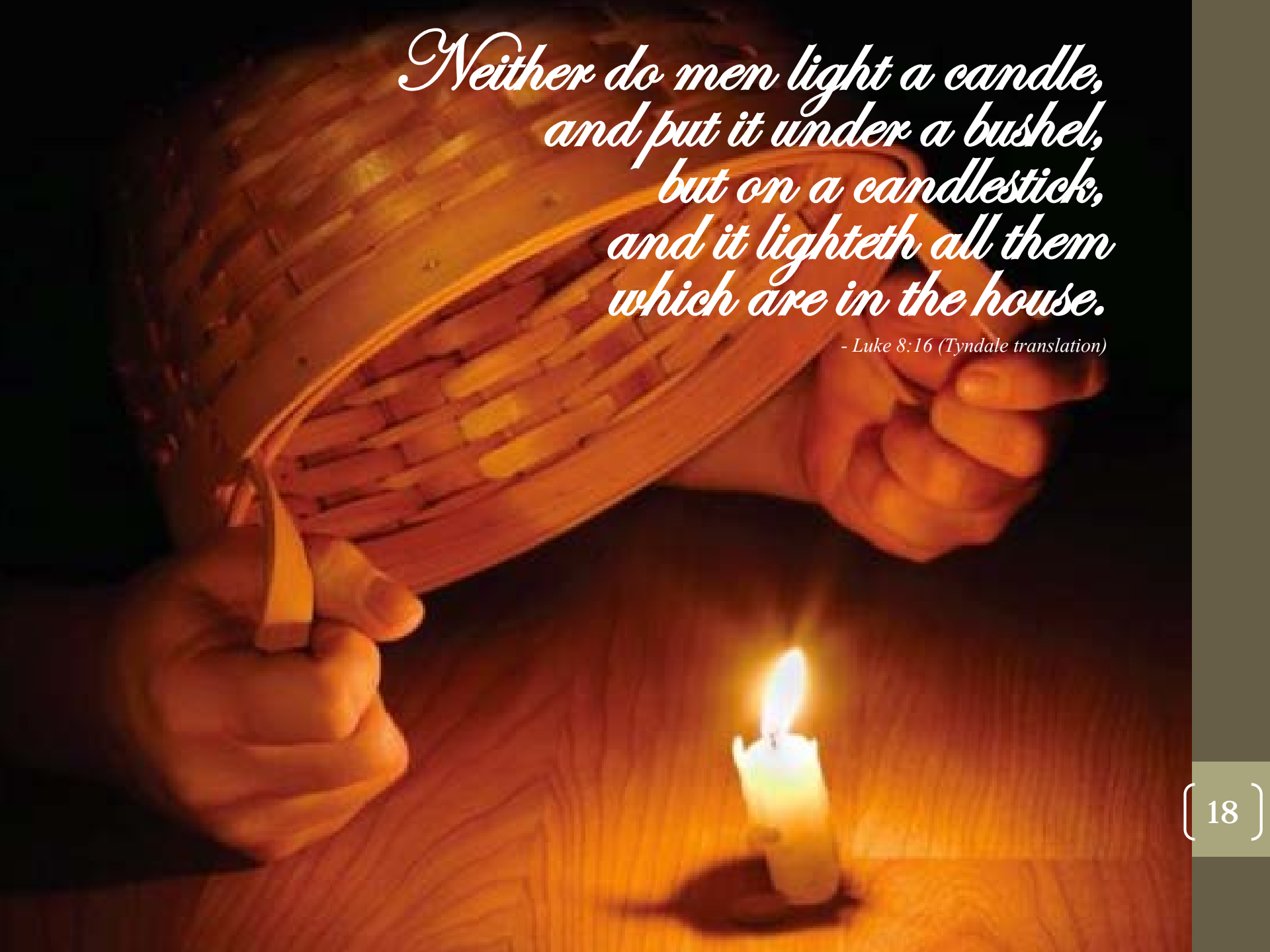
SOURCE: 2016-17 tuition rates posted on each school's website. Accessed 9/2/16.



Not all about the Benjamins

- It's about **VALUE**.
- SC4 has outstanding, experienced, student-centered **professors and instructors**, many of whom have worked in the fields they teach.
- We have no graduate assistants teaching basic English, math... or anything else.
- Our student-to-teacher ratio is about **19:1**, generally smaller than a typical freshman course at a four-year school.
- And our **tuition is 66% to 75% lower...** for the same product. (Not to mention room and board savings.)
- **Experience + quality + savings = VALUE**



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a woven basket over a lit candle on a wooden table. The candle is lit, casting a warm glow. The basket is made of woven reeds or straw. The background is dark, making the light from the candle and the warm tones of the wood and basket stand out.

*Neither do men light a candle,
and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick,
and it lighteth all them
which are in the house.*

- Luke 8:16 (Tyndale translation)

The plan

- Create a **planned approach** to enrollment and recruitment
- Identify **potential growth areas** for enrollment
- Align enrollment goals with **program development, community needs** and local **employment demand**
- **Enhance business practices** and processes related to enrollment, including budgeting and staffing
- **Align marketing**, public relations and community outreach with the college's enrollment goals
- **Improve the student experience** from their first interest through enrollment (and beyond)



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 will focus on **social media platforms** and **communications methods** most used by our students.
- We will create and share **relevant content**.
- We will create a culture of **continuous evaluation and improvement**.

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



Deliver targeted recruitment

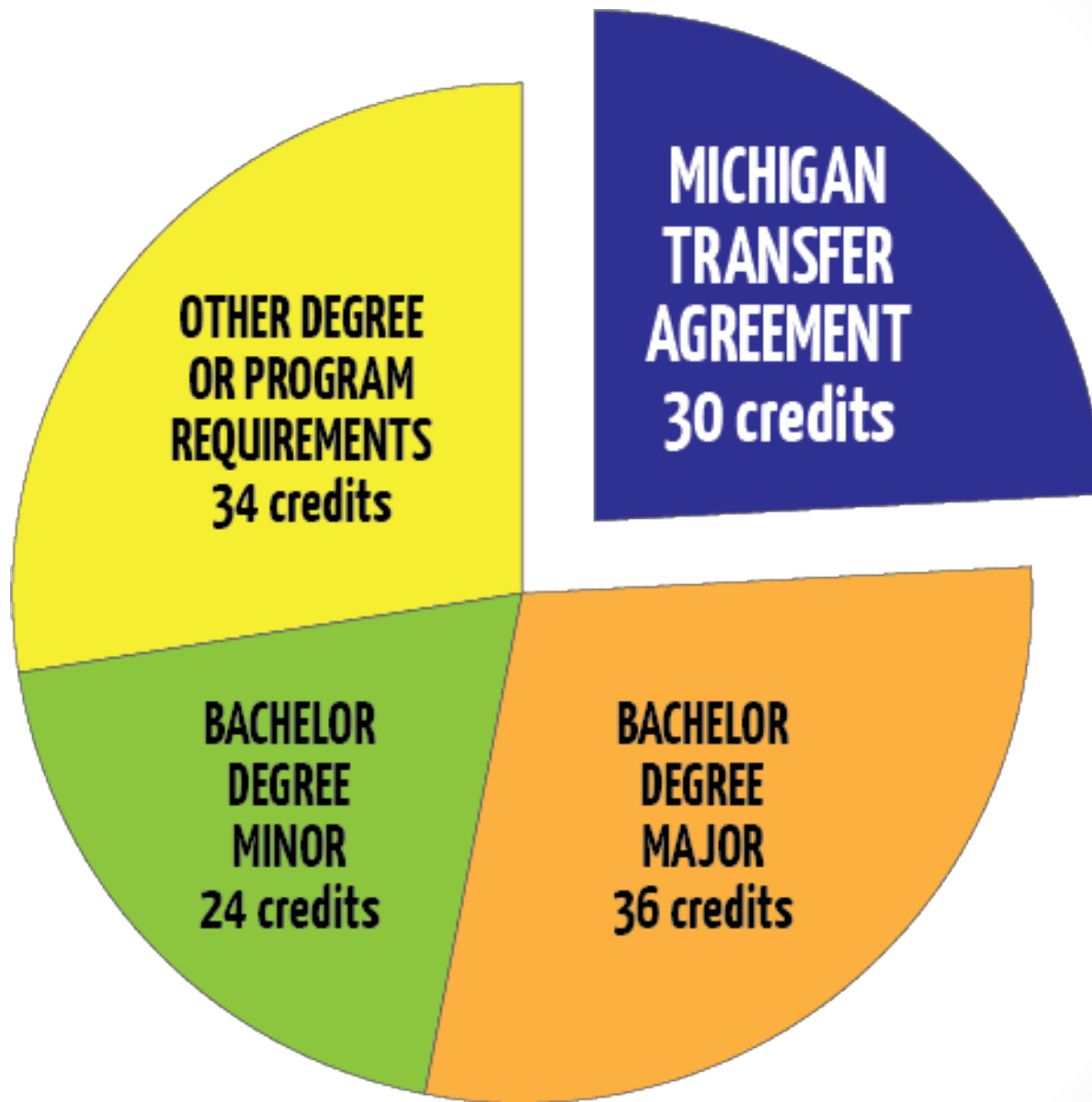


Strategy #1:

Focus the recruitment marketing message

- **The Value Proposition**
- **Transferability** via Michigan Transfer Agreement
- **“Start here. Go anywhere.”**
- **One year, 30 credits**





Deliver targeted recruitment



Strategy #2:

Improve responsiveness to prospect inquiries

- **Set and meet standards** for follow-up
- Include **faculty** and **other staff** in these contacts
- Be prepared to **meet students on their “turf,”** not the other way around
- Assume that all prospective students need help figuring out how to start college. Avoid scaring them away with details. Stop recruiting backwards!



Deliver targeted recruitment



Strategy #3:

Improve communication with prospects

- Optimize the existing **SC4 website**
- Develop **program guides** that show how to start at SC4 and complete a bachelor's degree at a four-year school
- Focus efforts on our **top 15 transfer schools** and work on additional articulations and partnerships with them
- Initiate a pay-per-click (PPC) **online advertising** program
- **Text, live chat** and **social media** responsiveness
- Marketing needs to be **friendly** and have a **sense of humor**
- **Seasonal targeted campaigns** to attract students returning home for the holidays



Deliver targeted recruitment



Strategy #4:

Outreach to non-traditional students

- Expand **non-credit career offerings** (Workforce Development)
- Emphasize the convenience of **online courses**
- Market **AGE degree** as a vehicle for self-designed or individualized preparation for careers
- Clarify **experiential learning** requirements
- Consider opportunities to reach adult learner populations by developing **off-campus SC4 Centers**
- Expand **online and hybrid** offerings



Deliver targeted recruitment



Strategy #5:

Develop relationships earlier

- Begin communicating with **high school juniors** – and even earlier – much sooner in their selection process
- Need to have **SC4 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



Deliver targeted recruitment



Strategy #6:

Align academic offerings with local needs

- Improve **class scheduling** process
- Investigate **Technical Middle College** concept
- Invigorate occupational degree **advisory groups** and strengthen relationships with local employers
- Develop **new programs**, certificates and certifications where demand exists
- Develop pathways for students to get A.S. degree while working on **Pre-Allied Health** programs
- **Align transfer degrees** with requirements at four-year institutions.



Deliver targeted recruitment



Strategy #7:

Incorporate faculty and alumni into recruitment



Deliver targeted recruitment



Strategy #8:

Evaluate and reconsider legacy recruitment efforts

- School **counselor outreach** methods and events
- **Visits** to and from local high schools
- Expand outreach to areas just **beyond the SC4 district**, but not part of any other community college
- Consider **rebate** for non-district students



Improve conversion rates



Strategy #9:

Establish Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) system

- **Long-term:** Dedicated higher education CRM system
- **Short-term:** Simple, cloud-based CRM (**Insightly**), that integrates with other online communications tools (including MailChimp, text, social media platforms)



Create repeatable efforts



Strategy #10:

Document and continually improve the process



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 goals.**
- Let your plan stay in "**permanent draft**" mode. Things always change; your plan should, too.
- **Doing nothing is not an option.**



Questions?

