



The Career College Information Source

The New Advanced Admissions Professional Profile

*An interview with Dr. Jean Norris, Managing Partner, Norton Norris, Inc.
and Amy Hrabak, Solutions Manager, Wonderlic, Inc.*

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Tell us about the background of the study. What motivated this, and how did Norton Norris and Wonderlic come together?

JEAN NORRIS: As you know, a lot of our work with admissions professionals in the sector focuses on the methods used in admissions that aren't working as well as they used to. That coupled with looking at the impact of outside influences such as government pressure, student buying behaviors and increased use of technology push for major change. There has been a lot of discussion as to why things aren't working as well, with some saying that it could be the quality of the actual inquiries, outdated admissions training, or even the people doing the job.

But what really triggered our work with Wonderlic was the discussion about the skill set of the admissions

rep for this new paradigm. I've heard some say that this generation of admissions reps doesn't have the same level of motivation as back in the "old

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days." This final piece is something that we'd talked about a number of times. It was clear to me that outdated training clearly contributed to poor results. We addressed this, first of all, through the development of the EnrollMatch® admissions training program. Since inception in 2011, we've seen great success in conversions, and great success in the student satisfaction process; even elements of



AMY HRABAK is a solutions manager with Wonderlic, Inc. and provides consultation around the design and implementation of student and employment assessments. Her experience primarily includes the application of job analysis

methodologies, benchmarking, developing structured behavioral interviews, conducting validation studies of selection measures, and designing and implementing opinion surveys. Amy has a master's degree in industrial/organizational psychology and has been with Wonderlic, Inc. for over five years.

retention have been really strong. Next, we began to look at who was doing exceptionally well with the EnrollMatch approach and wondered what these people were doing differently. What was it about that individual that perhaps we could somehow quantify to help the schools and colleges make decisions related to the hiring and/or training of those individuals? That’s when we turned to Wonderlic.

Wonderlic is very well known in and outside of the education space for having strong assessment tools, so we felt they could use those tools to help us quantify what some admissions reps were doing to help them be so successful. Together, we created the Advanced Admissions Professional Profile—something to be used for the training of current staff as well as in hiring.

Jean, when did you start seeing a decline in returns?

JEAN: I know as an admissions professional going back 26 years that

when I oversaw admissions, or I worked as an admissions rep myself, the conversion rates were so much higher than they are today. Today, as you look at the typical metrics that have been looked at in admissions, I think it’s been a steady decline for at least 10 years (with a larger dip in 2008 related to the economic downturn) using the current enrollment model. In my opinion, any time you have a model in which over 90 percent of the time those students are walking away, it’s time to look at the model don’t you think?

From the Wonderlic perspective, this is not what we know you for. We know you for analyzing students and telling us whether they’re going to be successful or not. So was this a stretch for Wonderlic to get their head around this?

AMY HRABAK: No, not at all. We have a standard job analysis process to systematically gather the competencies required for a given position, understand



DR. JEAN NORRIS began her educational pursuit in a 10-month medical assisting diploma program. In the 26 years since, she has served in the role of admissions rep, dean of admissions, faculty member, vice president of marketing, vice president of enrollment, and vice president of organizational development at private schools, colleges and universities. Currently Jean is a managing partner at Norton | Norris, Inc., a Chicago-based marketing/consulting/training firm focused exclusively in the higher education sector. Dr. Norris is often called upon to speak about her experiences and promote the career college sector at national conferences, commencements and organizational retreats. Her research, articles, and interviews can be found in many well-known publications serving the sector.

Jean is the developer of EnrollMatch®—the ethical enrollment process, a comprehensive admissions training program offering proven results to balance

compliance and performance. EnrollMatch® is the **FIRST** and **ONLY** admissions training program to receive legal endorsement for alignment with accrediting and federal admissions related standards. Jean earned a bachelor’s degree in management, a master’s degree in communication and training and a doctoral degree in organizational leadership. Dr. Norris is also a Licensed Master Neurolinguistic Programming Practitioner.

In 2012, Jean and her son, Mike, authored and published their first book entitled, “No Sugar Added – Straight Talk From Those Living With Diabetes,” (nosugaradded.org) with all proceeds to benefit the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) in their search for a cure.

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the role, and determine the most appropriate assessments. Actually, that same general aptitude test that we use to predict whether or not a student will be successful has the same predictive success on the hiring side. In addition, we have personality assessments to help evaluate candidates' abilities. So initially we sat down with Jean and her colleagues to talk about what type of tool would be complementary to her EnrollMatch approach. But after that conversation, the job analysis allowed us to also leverage the knowledge of individuals that have been successful in their roles that could speak to what the job entails at their respective schools, characteristics of those that are successful and, on the flip side, characteristics of individuals who are not successful. That in turn allowed us to identify the abilities and characteristics that are more likely to create that successful environment.

Jean, you've been working with these people for years so your gut feeling must have told you kind of what the results would be, or did it?

JEAN: You always have a sense of the people who are good at what they do. Oftentimes you wish you could bottle that up and get more of those people. For us, there was a strong sense that the profile of today's admissions professional was different than the past and this proved true. We're also cognizant that something as important as hiring and training can't be based on a gut instinct.

When sharing findings these really fall into a couple of different categories. One is related to people who have been doing the job perhaps a really, really long time and know a certain way of how to do things, and maybe they didn't score as well or as a perfect

match in certain areas, but they have a willingness and desire to get better. This is something we can definitely work with. The second category relates to those people who aren't really a match and have no desire to change. I think that's probably one of our biggest surprises out there. There are some people who just don't have the ability to adapt. They

think, "This has always worked; this is how I've always done it; I used to be the star and I'm going to keep doing this." Unfortunately, if they can't adapt,

they end up pushing more students away than they actually get. Then there is the person who matches. What's fun about that is oftentimes you have people who do things a little differently and they're successful, but they don't really know what they're doing. I love when you find those people who are a match because it's such a great validation of their efforts.

So in terms of actionable results, now that you've done the study do you give everybody a Wonderlic before you hire them to be an admissions rep?

JEAN: We make it very clear to people that any tool used in the selection and/or training of an admissions professional is simply one data point. There are other things that should be considered along with that, including their prior experience and success. Interviews are another piece of the puzzle. Each thing contributes to the decision-making process, including the profile assessment.

I'm sure it comes with fine print that says this applies to some

When you look at an industry that is in flux, and always changing, it's only logical that the individuals in those positions need to change along with it.

people some of the time and not to everybody all the time, or something of that nature.

AMY: There's not a silver bullet, so to speak, and in terms of personality it's one piece that should be evaluated in consideration of all other information

you have regarding an individual's capabilities.

The ability for any individual to build a relationship, to build rapport, to listen effectively, to have a certain cognitive ability to use judgment effectively, to be skilled enough to have a variety of responses to match student preferences – those are true skill sets that are at a higher level than what we've seen in how we've chosen admissions people in the past.

JEAN: When you look at an industry that is in flux, and always changing, it's only logical that the individuals in those positions need to change along with it. The more objective we can make

the hiring process, I think it increases our ability to be successful in getting the right fits in those positions. I like to have stable people in those positions that can meet the needs of the organization and be there for that student for the long-term. So we look at this assessment as a valuable tool to selecting the right people. It serves everybody. It serves the organization and even that person who doesn't want to be in the wrong job. They want to make sure that they're a good fit with the students that we're serving. I like adding this into the mix to help take a very subjective or sometimes subjective, interviewing process and make it more objective.

Is this really a matter of hiring right, or hiring almost right, and then training right?

JEAN: It's about increasing the odds of hiring the right person for sure, and

absolutely training. You can use this with your existing staff. As people take this assessment, it will show them where they're strong and where there are matches, and also where there are opportunities to reinforce skills. That's really exciting for us because it really does come down to training in targeted aspects to help those individuals be the most effective in their position.

Amy, if I'm a school person reading this, is this a product that I can purchase from you to profile my prospective hires and my current people, or is it a report I download from you? What is it?

AMY: Jean offers the personality profile for all of her EnrollMatch clients. Additionally, Wonderlic provides a more comprehensive hiring solution that includes the general aptitude test, the structured behavioral interview guide developed for the profile, and access to the testing platform that supports the administration of the tests, comparing candidates' scores and reports, and essentially managing the entire recruiting and selection process.

Jean, based on this can you give me a couple key components of the successful admissions person today?

JEAN: The good news is we discovered that individuals in this type of environment have skill sets that are similar to what we've seen through time. It's just that the *weight (or importance)* of those skill sets have shifted. Individuals who are most successful tend to have enhanced cognitive ability, adaptability, and use more of a true counseling approach compared to past admissions profiles. So they still have sales skills. They're

still about communication skills. It's still about relationship building and yet there's more weight that we've seen in this profile related to the ability to use rapport building and develop meaningful relationships—to build trust. The other thing that we speak to a lot in EnrollMatch training is something called requisite variety. We see in successful admissions people that they have two things: First is awareness and the second is flexibility. Awareness is the ability to understand whether what they're doing is working or not. If it's not, what could they do differently? If they have flexibility, that means they have more than one approach or method to address any given situation. Successful admissions professionals today need to have a number of what we call "tools" or different strategies that they can pull out at any given point to adjust. So that flexibility helps them be very, very successful.

Given the marketplace today, how long do you see this being valid until things shift again?

AMY: Because the skills and traits we're looking for are an awareness and an ability to adapt, the pieces will sustain over time. As far as the profile that we've built, I foresee it being flexible or fluid enough down the line to focus on folks and on training that will equip them with skills that will sustain.

So this profile will be updated periodically?

AMY: Right now there's nothing in the works to have it updated, but it could down the line if there is a need that arises. But I don't see that happening in the next few years.

JEAN: We were very careful in the sense of who we selected to be part of

the profile to meet very strict criteria. Using the extensive research knowledge and approaches by Wonderlic, we feel very confident in the tool that's been created.

Jean, do these people really get results that make their numbers and keep the school open and stuff like that, or are they too busy relating?

JEAN: The ability for any individual to build a relationship, to build rapport, to listen effectively, to have a certain cognitive ability to use judgment effectively, to be skilled enough to have a variety of responses to match student preferences – those are true skill sets that are at a higher level than what we've seen in how we've chosen admissions people in the past. The ability to motivate somebody, or persuade somebody, or to build value for somebody, is the ability to understand them first. That has been a step that has been overlooked, or assumed, or skipped, in the past. We need to have this as the foundation of any admissions approach.

In addition, I encourage people to review their current results. How well is the current admissions approach working? Are there opportunities to enroll and retain more of the right students? If so, they might want to consider changing or adding things to their current approach.

Finally, we conducted a pilot study to measure the effectiveness of the EnrollMatch approach. Our sample included 41 campuses in 19 states and the schools/colleges showed improvements in all of the typical admissions metrics. The feedback received from participants, managers, and trainers has been overwhelmingly positive. And the EnrollMatch admissions training program is consistent with

accrediting and federal admissions related standards. Even prospective students have commented on the value of the approach.

AMY: To expand on that, down the line we anticipate providing some harder evidence that people will get results; that is, linking the assessment scores to student satisfaction and retention. That would be the next exciting step from Wonderlic's perspective.

That's where you're going to go next? You don't currently have that link of student satisfaction and retention and graduation?

AMY: With this specific profile no, we don't, but we rely on the information from the job analysis, as well as the reliability and validity of the test itself to provide that.

Anything else from either of you?

JEAN: I guess the final thing that I would share here is that those admissions professionals who have been

in the industry a long time and been successful, are the ones who've been able to adapt. They have been able to use their skill sets effectively and adjust. So I don't see this as being something that's monumentally different. I do see it as us needing to help them develop new skills to add to what they're already good at, and to perhaps strengthen some of those areas where they have skill sets but they haven't had to use them as much in the past. I often refer to it as using those muscles that haven't been exercised in a while. I think there's been too much of a heavy reliance on other skill sets that aren't working as much, or as well anymore, given the changing student needs and what the government will tolerate. So tools like this will help us find the right people to begin with, or add to that equation, and it will help the people in the job by giving them more training in those areas to be more successful.