

ETS® GRE® Jason Buitrago

On-screen: [ETS® GRE®]

On-screen: [Jason Buitrago, Executive Director, Enrollment Management, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine.]

On-screen: [Tell us about yourself and your institution.]

Speaker: - Jason Buitrago -

My name is Jason Buitrago and I currently serve as the Executive Director of Enrollment Management and Strategic Initiatives for Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine.

At the school of medicine, we have of course our flagship — the MD Program — which is certainly kind of our bread-and-butter of sorts in terms of the institutional kind of pillar. But alongside the MD program, we also had quite a bevy of other professional programs, master's programs, certificate programs — all in the realm of healthcare and medicine.

On-screen: [What are some of the changes you've made due to COVID?]

COVID-19 has really impacted our world in recruitment, admissions, and really how we engage with students. I think admissions has historically been incredibly personable in terms of having that in-person experience, right, visiting campuses, meeting with faculty, seeing the labs, seeing the research that's actually happening. And four or five months ago, in the month of March, that all quickly changed here in the state of Ohio.

From an admissions perspective, it became incredibly important for us to ensure that we were thoroughly reviewing and being more inclusive of our prospective students that were finishing up prerequisites as part of their undergraduate experiences. Understanding that we were not alone here at Case Western ... that the pandemic impacted all of our institutions. So understanding that some of our students did finish their programs in an online format, and what that meant for our industries, prerequisites ... our admissions requirements from program-to-program did vary and did change.

I will say that the other complications that COVID-19 brought about really were financial, as well, for many of our students and perspective students. The costs that come along with applying to different schools ... so we worked really closely with our perspective students and we're able to grant different types of application fee waivers for our students.

We also became more inclusive of all different types of standardized exam reviews. Many students were not able to take their planned, let's say GRE® or TOEFL®. So not having that immediate ability in the month of March or April — while the world was

trying to figure out this new normal — was something we had we had to be very cognizant of as well and inclusive. We didn't want students to miss out on a full year of potential study because they weren't able to take an examination at the onset.

Fortunately, so many of our partners started offering examinations remotely. The at-home options were gargantuan for so many of our students to have that level of flexibility. I think what was really kind of fascinating when I think of silver linings against the backdrop of a pandemic is that COVID-19 really forced so many of us to really re-engineer our processes.

I think, oftentimes, many of us in higher education and the institutions that partner with higher education, kind of rinse-and-repeat many of the same practices and many of the same processes. And right now, that's just not, not possible, quite frankly. So, having the opportunity to re-engineer, revisit and really re-think how we admit students, how we review students, and how we ultimately can position our institution in a way that ensures that our prospective students and our admitted students are ultimately identifying the right fit for them is at the forefront of everything that I do in admissions and recruitment. It's really all about the student and it should be about the student.

On-screen: [How are you addressing the recruitment challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis? Which do you think will be temporary versus permanent?]

Of course, we've shifted to a lot more virtual spaces. Whether it be leveraging different types of webinar platforms, or open-house platforms in a more virtual format, has been a blessing, quite frankly. To have that flexibility to be able to engage with students, prospective students and to really kind of spread the word of your institution and the mission of your institution across cities, time-zones, countries, in a more cohesive fashion has been a fantastic result of us shifting so many of our processes online.

So yeah, absolutely, I mean, when it comes to interviewing candidates oftentimes the, you know, traditional, in-person interview is just not possible. And it is not safe, right? We want to make sure we have that environment for our students to feel comfortable. And to leverage the power of technology to be able to move their candidacies forward. Leveraging Zoom, leveraging other platforms that would be able to help cement and add color to their application.

I think that's been, that's been probably the biggest pieces that we've shifted in the last few months, since we've been in COVID-19, is that oftentimes, many of our quantitative metrics, as part of an application, are pretty easy to discern, right? Pretty easy to run statistical analysis and to determine what those numbers look like.

The qualitative components of an application, what I like to call 'the color' of the application itself is what I deem pretty much the richness of the application and it helps really bring those numbers to life. So, leveraging online video platforms to really spread the word of the institution but also to allow the student and the applicant to provide that layer of color is an important piece of what we do.

On-screen: [What is one piece of advice you would give to your counterparts at other schools about managing through this crisis?]

I think if I were to give some advice to my peers, my colleagues at other institutions, is to become comfortable in the uncomfortable.

I think that the world we live in right now is dramatically changing and we have to adjust so many of our kind of standard norms, but see the silver lining in that. The opportunity to invent, the opportunity to re-engineer, the opportunity to create something new.

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End of Video: ETS® GRE® Jason Buitrago Video.

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