

How Canisius College finally started growing again

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It's been a succession of frustrating years regarding enrollment at Canisius College.

Finally, the private college in Buffalo is getting its groove back.

Canisius received paid deposits for about 530 freshmen for the fall 2019 class, putting it on course to increase 15 percent over last year.

That's no small matter. The college faces challenging regional demographics, a generation of cost-conscious consumerism that has hammered small private institutions and a public policy framework that benefits its State University of New York counterparts.

By comparison, the college had 680 freshmen in the fall 2013 class, which was the beginning of a precipitous year-over-year decline because of the factors mentioned above.

Canisius has enacted a variety of strategies to combat the trend.

President [John Hurley](#) has long talked about a "rightsizing" in which the faculty, staff and programmatic breadth shrink along with enrollment. Canisius pushed in the last three years to shutter or alter unpopular programs while adding degrees in hot areas such as integration marketing and communications, data analytics, finance and physician assistant studies.

In 2017 the college unveiled the "Excellence Within Reach" initiative, which reduced the tuition sticker price by 23 percent to \$27,000 a year and lowered on-campus residence hall rates by \$2,000 a year.

But Hurley said the biggest difference this year is the message about the quality of the academic experience.

That used to be the core of the institution's message, but somewhere along the way it got diluted. In print pieces, open houses, campus visits and digital marketing, the durable outcome from a Canisius education was the theme.

"I was involved on the front lines with a lot of students and their parents and I heard their individual stories," Hurley said. "We may not have been the cheapest alternative out there but as people looked at the results we're getting in biology, in pre-med, in accounting and finance, I think that takes hold and people see that it's worth stretching a bit."



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