

PRIVATE // 4-YEAR



Fastest-Growing College Shifts to Nearpeer from Discord & Achieves Record Enrollment


STRATEGIC BELONGING


When she was named Trine University's new Vice President for Enrollment Management in 2020, Kim Bennett was determined to help the university expand – and since she began leading the university's recruitment efforts, Trine's enrollment has nearly tripled. Now, Trine is the fastest-growing private university in the state of Indiana.



The key to Trine's success has been personalizing outreach to every prospective student – and this practice has yielded strong results. However, never wanting to rest on their laurels, Trine's team began seeking new ways to engage with prospects even earlier in the recruitment journey. This is where Nearpeer came in.

KEY FINDINGS

According to Trine University's Vice President for Enrollment Management, "[Nearpeer] is the most effective pre-enrollment tool we've ever used." Here's why:

 **60%** of Trine recruits said Nearpeer made them **more excited and committed**

 **49%** **lower melt** rate for incoming Trine students who used Nearpeer

  Nearpeer is recognized as a **helpful complement to StarRez** for roommate matching

A FAST-GROWING PRIVATE INSTITUTION & A SMART ENROLLMENT PHILOSOPHY



PERSONALIZATION, BELONGING, AND CONNECTION ARE KEY

When VP Bennett was installed as the university's head of enrollment, she made her approach clear: every new recruit would feel a sense of belonging at the university, and "personalization" would be the key to their strategic approach. "Every communication with potential students – whether website, letter, email, or text message – [will be] personalized, customized, relevant, engaging, and nurture interest in Trine University."

From their earliest interaction with the university, VP Bennet wants every prospective student to feel that Trine is their "home away from home," and it's where they belong.

This strategy has served Trine well for many years; however, a gap emerged in Trine's communication and engagement plan. The university had struggled to find a virtual platform that could extend this sense of community and belonging digitally into the admitted-student journey, as early as the acceptance letter. To recruit today's Gen Z students (and tomorrow's Gen Alpha students), VP Bennett knew this had to change.

WHERE EXISTING PLATFORMS FELL SHORT

Like most higher-ed institutions today, Trine had long leveraged platforms like Instagram, X, and Facebook in an attempt to engage with their admitted applicants – but those platforms only delivered shallow experiences and generic interactions. Discord, the platform that Trine shifted to most recently, hadn't done the trick either. To university leadership, Discord felt like the "Wild Wild West" – they felt like they never had a sense of control over the virtual community, and staff could never get a handle on who they were interacting with as students could use avatars and screen-names when in the community. This anonymity was not helpful.

Plus, many conversations spiraled into irrelevance and risked contaminating the experience admitted-students looking to build friendships and learn important information. Also, it was very easy for misinformation to spread, and there were no analytics that could help Trine's enrollment staff better understand and better serve their recruits.



PERSONALIZED. CUSTOMIZED. INTENTIONAL.

And, with Discord primarily being a platform for more extroverted people and being less ubiquitous than Instagram, X, and other social apps, it actually created a higher barrier to entry for admitted recruits who had never created a Discord account before. This was not the ideal solution Trine had envisioned.

SEARCHING FOR A BETTER ADMITTED-STUDENT EXPERIENCE

As she searched for alternatives that could really deliver the highly personalized, highly customized, and highly effective experience that she imagined for her admitted recruits, VP Bennett learned about Nearpeer. Since Nearpeer already partners with a number of private colleges in Indiana (including DePauw University, Butler University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College), VP Bennett had heard some of her peers at other institutions recommending the platform, so she decided to give Nearpeer a try at her campus.



Nearpeer's higher ed partners in Indiana

Almost immediately, VP Bennett realized that Nearpeer is exactly what she was looking for and precisely what was missing from their engagement strategy with pre-enrolled students. In fact, less than a year into Trine's partnership with Nearpeer, VP Bennett declared that Nearpeer is "the most effective pre-enrollment tool we've ever used at the university." And the result illustrate why.



Kimberly Bennett

Vice President for
Enrollment Management

"[Nearpeer] is the most effective pre-enrollment tool we've ever used at the university."

TAILORED, PRIVATE SPACE EXCLUSIVELY FOR TRINE'S ADMITS

Unlike with Instagram, X, Discord, and the other platforms that Trine had used with their admit pool, Nearpeer allowed the university to create a custom-built, private, healthy, and controlled space that felt distinct to Trine – a space where their enrollment team could guide their admitted recruits to start building affinity with one-another and the campus before they had even decided if they were going to commit to enrolling at Trine.

CUSTOM-BUILT COMMUNITY-BUILDING

By having such a highly-personalized virtual space, Nearpeer really allowed Trine to stand out from competing schools where students had also been accepted. When admitted students joined Trine's customized Nearpeer community, they could engage with hundreds of other admitted recruits who were also considering Trine, and they could join custom-built microcommunities within the app for commuter students, honors students, transfer students, and direct pathway students.

Trine also leveraged Nearpeer to make incoming recruits aware of some of their more popular (and more niche) campus clubs – groups like the Bridge Club and the Guitar Club. And, for recruits not familiar with Angola, Indiana, Trine used Nearpeer as a way to promote some of the fun local recreation on or near campus like the Zollner Golf Course, the MTI Bowling Alley, and Pokagon State Park.



MEASURABLE IMPACT OF NEARPEER

This type of information dissemination, hyper-community building, and organic and authentic interaction was lightyears beyond what Trine could achieve with any prior platform. And, one of the other major benefits of the Nearpeer platform quickly started to emerge – Trine was now getting dozens of actionable and insightful data points on each admitted recruit who joined their Nearpeer community.

Not only were VP Bennett and her team now able to see what interests and hobbies each admitted student was passionate about, but they could also see how each recruit was engaging. How many times had a recruit logged into the platform? How many connections had they made within Trine's admitted-student community? How many groups had a prospective student joined, and how much were they engaging in 1-to-1 chats with peers or in the larger community group chats?

STUDENT INSIGHTS AND A TOOL THAT ENHANCES EXISTING PLATFORMS

In addition to directly improving recruitment, the insights and ongoing data flow from Nearpeer provided so much intelligence for VP Bennett and her strategic enrollment team. It allowed them to better forecast their Fall enrollment and determine how likely a student was to accept their admission, deposit, and matriculate. This was intelligence that the university could never glean from Discord.



These are insights for Trine from Nearpeer's reporting dashboard

SUPERCHARGING ROOMMATE MATCHING & A DEEPER COMMITMENT TO ENROLL

Perhaps most powerful, though, was the strong synergy that Nearpeer proved to deliver with StarRez, Trine's longstanding housing platform. Knowing that if an admitted recruit or a deposited recruit finds a roommate early in their admissions journey at Trine that they will be more likely to matriculate, the university makes

roommate and housing assignments available as early as February for their fall recruits. StarRez is integral to this process and by leveraging Nearpeer's roommate-matching features and creating a "Looking for Roommate" group chat in Nearpeer, StarRez suddenly felt "super-charged" by Nearpeer. And the incoming recruits appreciated this opportunity to engage.

"I was feeling super nervous because I didn't know many people going to Trine and I had no idea how to find a roommate," one student expressed. "Then, on Nearpeer, I connected with a girl who had similar interests and career goals as me, and now we are roommates."

- Incoming Trine Recruit

This sense of relief and reduced nervousness that Nearpeer made possible was a common theme in the feedback that Trine heard from its students.



THOUSANDS OF NEW FRIENDSHIPS, THOUSANDS OF HOURS OF ENGAGEMENT

Another recruit said, "Nearpeer is how I connected with my roommates! I got to talk with them over Nearpeer and got to know them better before ever meeting, and it definitely helped ease my worries about who I was going to be living with."

-Incoming Trine Recruit

In Trine's first year of partnership with Nearpeer, **more than 50% of their incoming class opted to use Nearpeer** – a number far exceeding any prior admitted-student community they had tried for their new recruits. **Trine's admits spent over 1,000 hours in Nearpeer sparking new friendships that couldn't be replicated elsewhere.** This engagement also led to engagement beyond the app, such as in real life. Plus, the average Nearpeer user at Trine **returned to the platform 63 times** throughout the admissions journey, which made Nearpeer highly effective as a communication tool beyond traditional email messaging from the university. And, the **average incoming student at Trine made 20 friends** on the platform before starting classes, which not only made these students less likely to melt but also more likely to persist.



Majority

of incoming students opted to use Nearpeer



1,000+

hours of engagement catalyzing new friendships



63

logins per student on average



20

friends made per student, on average

In fact, Trine leaders determined that committed recruits who used Nearpeer had about half the melt rate of the recruits who didn't utilize the platform, meaning that **Nearpeer users melted at a rate that was 49% lower.** These outcomes helped VP Bennett and Trine's enrollment management team start 760 new students in their incoming class this fall, an all-time record for the university.

Beyond these encouraging findings, Trine's incoming recruits were also surveyed about how Nearpeer influenced their decision to deposit at Trine and stay committed for the fall.

REDUCING STUDENT ANXIETY WHILE GROWING ENROLLMENT



A staggering 60% of survey respondents reported that being part of Trine's Nearpeer community as an admitted student made them more excited about their admission to Trine and their decision to deposit at the university. Further, 49% of the incoming recruits said that Nearpeer helped to reduce their anxiety about starting school – and 1 in 3 new students said that Nearpeer helped them feel more connected to the Trine community.

As one student expressed, “When I first got on the app, I was nervous... but it was super easy to use, and I loved the ability to add my interests and be able to see other people I had things in common with. I found myself using the app more and more and loved when I would get notified about all the new friends I was making.”

-Incoming Trine Recruit

This student expressed how much Nearpeer lessened her nervousness and ultimately determined that Nearpeer is best described as “super helpful” for prospective recruits.

Nearpeer is excited to continue serving Trine and VP Bennett in their mission to engage admitted students in a highly personalized, highly effective way. Launching nine months before the start of classes every year (and five months before Trine's deposit deadline) gives the university ample runway to help their admitted applicants develop a sticky experience with the institution and its community, which provides Trine a strong advantage over other schools where these students have been admitted.



Together, Trine and Nearpeer are eager to continue to break enrollment records and super-serve thousands of admitted students each year, all while maintaining Trine's status as Indiana's fastest-growing private university.

THE Nearpeer[®] EXPERIENCE



LAUNCH QUICKLY

Nearpeer is a turnkey solution that can be implemented with minimal lift from university partners. With no system integration or university staffing required, the platform has launched in as little as 24 hours for clients seeking immediate help growing enrollment, improving retention, and supporting greater sense of belonging among students.

SEE SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

Institutions using Nearpeer can achieve 3X higher yield rates, up to 93% melt reduction, 17% year-over-year retention increases, and 16% higher four-year graduation rates. Students also report reduced anxiety and isolation, along with greater inclusion and belonging, making Nearpeer the top choice for improving student enrollment, success, and mental health.

TRUSTED PARTNER AND REAL IMPACT

Nearpeer partners with institutions of all sizes to support diverse learners, from undergraduates to adults and early-college students. Nearpeer conducted the largest clinical trial on belonging's impact on student success in higher education, establishing itself as a leader the field. This transformational work is backed by philanthropic leaders like The Lumina Foundation and The Lilly Endowment.

ENHANCE EXISTING INVESTMENTS

Nearpeer is a powerful platform that seamlessly enhances universities' existing systems, including student information systems, res-life platforms, marketing tools, student success platforms, and resources for tutoring, mentorship, and mental health.

ACHIEVE COMPELLING RETURNS

Nearpeer is a proven, high-ROI investment for universities, driving increased yield, reduced melt, and improved persistence. Partner colleges see \$1 spent on Nearpeer delivering well over \$10 in tuition and other enrollment-related revenue, with some achieving up to 97x ROI. No wonder *Forbes* calls Nearpeer "A very big deal."

HIGH ADOPTION

"Will I fit in?" is today's top concern for college students, and without an early sense of belonging, enrollment and persistence decline sharply. Nearpeer addresses this need by helping students form meaningful friendships before orientation, leading to an average 50% voluntary adoption—rising to 95% at some schools.

Forbes

Forbes on Nearpeer

“For those in the know, or who follow the razor’s edge world of college recruitment, boosting enrollment is gold. But also boosting retention, as was shown in this study [of Nearpeer], is platinum...

This is a very big deal.”

ABOUT NEARPEER

Nearpeer is a peer-to-peer engagement platform that strengthens students' sense of belonging from their first touchpoint, pre-enrollment through graduation. By using advanced matching algorithms, Nearpeer creates personalized, healthy 1:1 connections that help every student feel seen, supported, and part of a community. Institutions partner with Nearpeer to offer a custom-built, safe, and inclusive virtual community space proven to increase confidence, commitment, and connection across the student lifecycle. This approach consistently drives measurable gains in enrollment, persistence, resilience, and graduation rates — while also reducing loneliness, anxiety, and isolation among students. It's why so many colleges and universities trust Nearpeer to power belonging at scale—and why Forbes called Nearpeer “a very big deal.”



 **Nearpeer**®



For more information, visit nearpeer.com.