A Joint Approach to Recruiting:
Purdue and Ivy Tech Team Up to Reach Local High School Students

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Abstract

Recruiting is a special challenge to many community colleges and satellite campuses of four-year institutions. Their student bodies are composed primarily of local residents, many of whom have full- or part-time employment. Each college must compete with other schools in the local area, as well as out-of-town schools and other interests, to attract enrollment. This paper presents an experimental recruiting approach by one of Purdue University's "satellite" campuses and Ivy Tech Community College. One professor from each school teamed up to visit targeted classrooms in a number of local high schools. The discussion includes the motivation that instigated the experiment, the goals of the venture, the general approach, and the content of the presentation.

Background

Purdue is a public university in the state of Indiana. The main campus is located in West Lafayette, and includes a number of subordinate colleges and schools (e.g., College of Engineering, College of Technology, Krannert School of Management, etc.). There are two other types of campuses located around the state. "Regional" campuses, although affiliated with West Lafayette, are relatively independent institutions and have their own promotion and tenure systems. "Statewide" locations, on the other hand, are "a direct academic and administrative extension of the College of Technology at the West Lafayette campus."[1] As such, each faculty member reports to his/her respective department head at the main campus, and falls under the promotion and tenure system there.

Significant differences exist between Purdue-West Lafayette (Purdue-WL) and the statewide campuses. The former consists almost exclusively of traditional (i.e., full-time) students, while the latter are structured to include both traditional and non-traditional students (typically older, working full or part time, and often with families). Recruiting efforts among the campuses are independent. Thus, although the statewide locations benefit from the reputation of the Purdue name, they are on their own, with relatively miniscule budgets, to advertise and recruit for their own respective campuses.

Ivy Tech, now formally called Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, has evolved into the recognized community college system for the state. The system has 23 sites offering a broad array of programs. These include short-term training and certification for specific skill sets, generally one year or less; remedial programs for students who need some help preparing for post-secondary education; a large number of associate degrees in fields such as business and accounting, health and medicine, education, the legal profession, and technology;[2] and transfer

options for many of their programs that allow graduates to move into four-year degree programs. Their technology offerings include Automotive, Design, Electronics and Computer, Industrial, and Manufacturing. Since these programs align most closely with Purdue's programs in South Bend, these have been our primary recruiting focus.

We have been interested in what other universities and community colleges have done in the area of joint recruiting. In a description of Western Illinois University's dual enrollment program, one advantage is described as "Community colleges and Western Illinois University can enjoy joint recruitment in area high schools." [3] California State University (CSU) and the California Community Colleges (CCC) have joined together to provide web-based resources on recruiting.[4] A number of community colleges have reported participation in joint recruitment with four year partners, with an example being Western Kentucky Community and Technical College and the University of Kentucky. They report a partnership in recruiting that includes collaborative scholarship programs and attendance at college nights at local high schools.[5] This last example is directed specifically at engineering careers.

Research has provided examples of joint recruitment, but has not yet shown the results of such activity. Since our individual programs consist of only a few hundred students, we hope to determine the success of our venture by polling incoming pupils during the admissions and registration process.

Motivation

The primary motivation for our recruiting efforts is low enrollments. Both institutions are struggling with full time equivalent (FTE; 15 credit hours per FTE) counts that are lower than their goals. There are, however, a couple of additional factors driving the endeavor. First, one of the main purposes of Purdue-Statewide and Ivy Tech is to serve the local community. Since the target population for recruiting is limited—within an hour or so of each campus—it is practical for the faculty to play a more direct role. Second, one of the authors was new to the area, so engaging with local high schools was a good way to learn about the local community while also helping the high schools, Purdue, and Ivy Tech.

Goals

The overarching goal for the recruiting is simple enough: increase enrollments. But we only want to attract students whose academic preparation and educational objectives are well-matched with either Purdue or Ivy Tech. That means more than persuading students to attend one of our schools; it requires educating them more generally about post-secondary opportunities so they can make informed choices. This entails building relationships with teachers and/or counselors at local secondary schools, in order to contact students and/or parents directly. Although arguably more work, it is also more personal, and should help retention while serving the greater good of the state of Indiana and the country.

Another contributory goal stems from the fact that Purdue's South Bend location (Purdue University-South Bend, or PUSB) was not well known in the area. Although most everyone knows of both the Ivy Tech community college system and Purdue's main campus in West

Lafayette, the same was not true of the South Bend campus. Anecdotal interaction with the local populace indicated a disturbing lack of awareness of PUSB. So, one of our goals is to place the PUSB name in front of a large number of high school students.

Finally, there was some concern about possible competition between Ivy Tech and Purdue for two-year students. Although at first glance there appears to be some conflict, the truth is that our two schools serve different clientele. Moreover, Ivy Tech serves as a "feeder" school for PUSB, passing capable students from its programs into those at Purdue. And, occasionally, PUSB will "pass back" a student who is not a good fit for a Big 10 university, but still wants a post-secondary education.

Thus, there are five ancillary goals intended to contribute to the main goal of increasing enrollments:
- educate HS students about post-secondary opportunities;
- build ties with local high schools (teachers, counselors, students, parents);
- serve the greater good for Indiana and the country;
- place Purdue – South Bend's name in front of a large number of high school students;
- take a non-competitive approach that has the students' benefit in mind, not just the academic institutions.

Approach

With the goals decided, there were four basic questions to answer regarding our approach.
- Which school should we contact first, second, etc.?
- Who should we contact first within each school to propose a visit?
- Which students should see the presentation within each school?
- What should we say to the students, and how should we do it?

We decided it made most sense to start with large public schools that had already implemented Project Lead the Way (PLTW), and where we already had one or more contacts. This made our first choice easy, because the largest school in our metropolitan area had been teaching PLTW classes for several years, and we knew a couple of teachers in its technology department. The next school we visited was also a large PLTW school. Fortuitously, one of the authors met a guidance counselor from that school while helping coach their daughters' little league basketball team. Third in line was a new PLTW school where one of the authors sat on the advisory board. Beyond that, one of us had to start cold-calling.

The general approach we used in cold-calling was to start with the principal, explain what we were doing (including what we had done at other schools), and ask if they were interested. The reception varied from school to school. One principal was downright excited, dealt with us directly, and got us set up for a visit quickly. Another met with one of us, a program coordinator, and a couple of high school teachers, then passed us to the program coordinator to set up a very successful visit. A third sounded very interested and referred us to a technology teacher to set up the visit. Unfortunately, two or three calls and messages left for this teacher never generated a call back. A fourth school, probably the second largest in the region, never

responded to our calls. The principal was not available when we called and never called back. (It still is not clear whether he ever received the messages…)

Officials at two local private schools were somewhat less enthusiastic than their public school counterparts. One response was subdued enough that we decided not to follow up. The other was receptive, but different from the public schools. They had an entire week set aside just for recruiting, and scheduled us into one of those slots. Although the attitude of the person who sponsored our visit could initially be characterized as guarded, it changed dramatically after she saw our presentation. At that point, she invited us to return next year, gave each of us a coffee/drink mug with the high school name and mascot on it, and said she would set us up for a 4-hour block so we could speak to dozens of students instead of just a few.

After gaining entrance into a school, the next question was which students should attend. We generally request access to students taking classes in technology, electronics, physics, computer programming, robotics, etc. Different schools handle this differently. The largest school in our area brings us out for a 2-day marathon of six to eight presentations to hundreds of students in a wide variety of science and technology classes. Other schools invite us during a "success" period, in which students are free to go to any class where they want/need extra study time; appropriate students are then encouraged to attend the presentation. Based on our experience, we prefer the "mandatory" approach because the turnout is invariably larger.

The final question concerns what to say and how to say it. These issues are addressed in the next section.

Content

Whenever making a presentation, one of the first things to consider is the audience. Given our goal of educating students (and teachers, counselors, parents, etc.), we decided to start with the basics: who is right for engineering/technology, what makes it a good career, and what the differences are among engineering, engineering technology, and technology. We tell them that a good candidate for engineering/technology generally has an aptitude for science and math, likes to discover how and why things work, and likes to design and build things. At this point, we also call attention to the fact that the career fields are open to both women and minorities. Then, we talk about why it is a good career option, including salary and benefits, long-term health, enjoyment, and general quality of life. The last part of the background section discusses how the math, science, and theory get deeper going from technology to engineering; how the focus shifts from simply *how* a system works to the underlying explanation of *why* it works; and how the focus shifts toward application going from engineering to technology.

Next, we explain the differences between Purdue and Ivy Tech in South Bend. Since Ivy Tech is a community college, it only offers 2-year programs, while PUSB offers both 2- and 4-year programs. Ivy Tech, on the other hand, offers a broad array of programs, including vocational, technology, and professional, while PUSB only offers engineering technology. (Remember, only the College of Technology is involved in the Statewide program.) The PUSB degree programs, however, are directly equivalent to those of West Lafayette. Although Ivy Tech's technology programs are not the same as Purdue's, they can prepare students to pursue a 4-year

education at Purdue. Alternatively, they can prepare graduates to enter the work force directly upon graduation.

After differentiating Purdue from Ivy Tech, we distinguish between Purdue's South Bend and West Lafayette campuses. The former only offers engineering technology, is a small campus with small class sizes and more personal attention, is close to home, and has a mix of both traditional (right out of high school) and non-traditional students. The latter contains many different schools and colleges with a broad offering of programs, is a very large campus with a great variety of activities, is not within commuting distance of home, and consists almost entirely of traditional students.

Then we review the specific programs offered at PUSB—Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology, Mechanical Engineering Technology, Industrial Technology, Computer Graphics Technology, and Organizational Leadership and Supervision. This leads into the technology programs offered by Ivy Tech in South Bend: Automotive, Design, Electronics and Computer, Manufacturing, and Industrial.

In addition to the obligatory contact information, we offer a few closing remarks before opening for questions. First, we encourage them to think ahead about what they want to do, and take classes to prepare them while still in high school. Second, we inform them of the possibility of taking either Ivy Tech or Purdue classes while they are in high school, if they are ready. Since most of our classes and labs are offered late in the day, it is possible to do without interfering with the high school schedule (although it makes for a long day). Finally, we emphasize the importance of English, speaking, writing, and other soft skills; and we encourage them, even if planning to go into technical careers, not to give short shrift to that part of their high school education.

Conclusion

The authors believe that the recruiting relationship between Ivy Tech Community College and Purdue University in South Bend is a synergistic one. Although on the surface it might appear that we are competing for some of the same students, our experience suggests that we are not. In fact, since part of Ivy Tech's purpose is to prepare students to go beyond an associate-level degree, they can serve as a feeder, actually increasing enrollments at Purdue. Both institutions, however, draw students from the same area high schools. By doing joint recruiting, we take a broader picture to the students, and everyone wins: the students, Ivy Tech, Purdue, area employers who need engineering and technology graduates, and the community at large.

This is only our second year of recruiting work, so we have not yet reached all of the schools we hope to reach, nor have we reaped the benefits of increased enrollments. The bump in enrollments is likely 2 years or so in the future.

Nevertheless, there are encouraging signs. The first, and perhaps most notable, is the students' attentiveness. Although there is usually a small percentage who are not focused, the vast majority of students are very attentive to the presentation. Occasionally, we even get questions before we reach the Q&A. The other positive feedback has been from the teachers who have

attended. One commented that it was "the best I've ever seen." We firmly believe both teachers and students appreciate that the focus of our pitch is <u>education</u>, not persuasion. We give them the information, enabling them to make wise decisions about their lives.

We are hopeful that the positive feedback we have received so far is a harbinger of increased enrollments to come.

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[1] College of Technology Mission, Goals, and Programs. (2004, December). *Purdue University Bulletin*, 104(10), 9.
[2] Ivy Tech Community College Academic Programs web page. (2006). Retrieved March 2, 2007: http://www.ivytech.edu/programs/.
[3] Western Illinois University Admissions web page. (2007). Retrieved March 2, 2007: http://admissions.wiu.edu/info/transfer/dual.asp
[4] Keith, C., & Owens, R. (2006, October 23). *CSU and California Community Colleges Join Together to Boost Number of Math and Science Teachers*. Retrieved March 2, 2007, from California State University Public Affairs web site: http://www.calstate.edu/pa/news/2006/cccteachers.shtml.
[5] Mattis, M., Sislen, J. (2005). Recruitment and Retention. In *Enhancing the Community College Pathway to Engineering Careers* (pp. 36, 38). Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

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