Planning for Success: A Role for Chairs in Recruiting

by Abour Cherif, Karen Murkar, David Overbye, Sharon Reeves, and Lin Stefurak

The first article in this two-part series (Summer 2004 issue) provided a conceptual framework and practical strategies to harness the power of thinking and optimism among deans of academic affairs to help them become more effective academic leaders and to achieve higher levels of performance in meeting the university's mission and goals. Part two of this series details a recruitment approach used on selected campuses of DeVry University. This approach helps to identify the type of product knowledge and information that should be transmitted to potential students, the goal being to achieve concrete outcomes that can be implemented without the need to obtain additional consensus.

Recruiting students to a given university in general, and to a specific program in particular, is a major task in American higher education. Vast resources that include funding, energy, and time have been dedicated toward recruitment purposes. As the number of students who seek higher education has increased in the last 40 years, so too has the number of institutions that provide opportunities for students to receive postsecondary education. This fact, coupled with the nature of the economy and the dramatic increase in tuition costs, has created an intense competition among colleges and universities in recruiting students.

Traditionally speaking, recruitment of new students is a responsibility that is undertaken and/or supervised by the admissions office or a related entity within the university. Today, however, this task has become the responsibility of all stakeholders within the institution—faculty, staff, students, administration, alumni, and members of the board of the trustees. Yet the admissions office is still primarily responsible for salesmanship. They are the mechanism through which the institution's information is transferred to potential students. In order for the recruitment team members to become successful salespeople, they must get the prospective student to believe in the value and opportunities associated with their institution as much as they do. Otherwise, their salesmanship will not be productive. As a result, more and more colleges and universities have realized that the involvement of current students, faculty, chairs, and deans is essential in understanding the "product"—the true features and benefits that make a specific program at a given institution the best choice for the recruit. Their involvement is necessary to develop the relevant product knowledge and the materials that are to be provided to potential students and their parents. Their expertise, knowledge, and opinions are necessary to develop and implement effective strategies for delivering the institution's information and the product knowledge to potential students.

Phase I: Identifying Perceptions

Identifying students' perceptions of what potential new students should hear about the university and/or academic program.

1) Identify 10 students, preferably from more than one area of study or academic program.

2) Ask each student to answer the following questions individually. Give them approximately 10 minutes per question to formulate their answers.

- Assume that you have a group of three parents with their college-age sons and daughters gathered in front of you. You have a period of five minutes to "sell" the XYZ Program over the other university programs being offered at your campus. What three points will you make that you want the group to remember at the end of the five minutes (and to remember tomorrow and the next week as they decide which school to attend)?
- What three points would you make to admissions representatives to help them understand how to best motivate a prospective student to apply to your institution?

3) Divide the students into two groups (group together students from the same academic programs, if possible). Ask each group to share their answers to the two questions with their group members, to discuss their answers, and to come up with one answer for each question, per group. Give each group approximately 20 minutes to formulate a single group answer to each question.

4) Bring the members of the two groups together to share and discuss their answers to each question. Then ask the members of the groups to come up with one unified answer to each question. This represents the students' perceptions of what potential new students should hear about the university and/or academic program.

Identifying admissions'/recruitments' perceptions of what potential new students should hear about the university and/or academic program.

1) Identify 10 admissions representatives, preferably five from field recruitment and five from admissions recruitment.

2) Ask each of the representatives to answer the following questions individually. Give them approximately 10 minutes per question to formulate their answers.

- Assume that you have a group of three parents with their college-age sons and daughters gathered in front of you. You have a period of five minutes to "sell" the XYZ Program over the other university programs being offered at your campus. What three points will you make that you want the group to remember at the end of the five minutes (and to remember tomorrow and the next week as they decide which school to attend)?

- What three points would you make to other admissions representatives to help them understand how best to motivate a prospective student to apply to your institution?

3) Divide the representatives into two groups, preferably into a field recruitment group and an admissions recruitment group. Ask each group to share their answers to the two questions with their group members, to discuss their answers, and to come up with one answer for each question, per group. Give each group approximately 20 minutes to formulate a single group answer to each question.

4) Bring the members of the two groups together to share and discuss their answers to each question. Then ask the members of the groups to come up with one unified answer to each question. This represents the admissions'/recruitments' perceptions of what potential new students should hear about the university and/or academic program.

Identifying chairs'/deans' perceptions of what potential new students should hear about the university and/or academic program.

1) Identify those chairs/deans who are responsible for providing the product (program and school) knowledge necessary for admissions recruitment and field recruitment to recruit students to the institution and to specific programs.

2) Ask each dean/chair to answer the following questions individually. Give them approximately 10 minutes per question to formulate their answers.

- Assume that you have a group of three parents with their college-age sons and daughters gathered in front of you. You have a period of five minutes to "sell" the XYZ Program over the other university programs being offered at your campus. What three points will you make that you want the group to remember at the end of the five minutes (and to remember tomorrow and the next week as they decide which school to attend)?
- What three points would you make to admissions representatives to help them understand how best to motivate a prospective student to apply to your institution?

3) Divide the chair/dean representatives into five groups, preferably grouping deans together and chairs together. Add to each group two representatives from the admissions recruitment group (one admissions and one field recruitment representative). Ask each group to share their answers to the two questions with their group members, to discuss their answers, and to come up with one answer for each question, per group. Give each group approximately 20 minutes to formulate a single group answer to each question.

Phase II: Building Consensus

Bring the members of the chair/dean, admissions/recruitment, and the student groups together to share and discuss each of their unified answers to each of the two questions. Then ask the members of *all* the groups to come up with a single answer to each question. This represents the type of product knowledge that potential new students should hear about the university and/or academic program during the students' recruitment process.

Phase III: Developing Strategies

The following steps will enable the admissions/recruitment officers to successfully *use* the product knowledge to recruit students.

1) Divide the members into a manageable number of groups. Make sure that each group contains a cross section of representatives from the various groups of chairs, deans, admissions recruitment representatives, field recruitment representatives, and student groups.

2) Ask each group to come up with the five most effective and achievable strategies that could be used by the admissions/recruitment officers to successfully use the product knowledge to recruit students. Give each group at least 20 minutes to develop their strategies.

3) Bring the members of all the groups together. Ask each group to present their proposed strategies and to justify them by explaining why they think their strategies would work and be effective. They must also discuss the challenges that their proposed strategies might encounter and how to deal with those challenges.

4) After each group presents its proposed strategies, allow the members of the groups to ask questions and to challenge each other's strategies.

5) Lastly, ask the members of all the groups to come up with five unified strategies that could be used by the admissions/recruitment officers in their efforts to recruit potential new students and to educate prospective students about the university and/or academic program during the recruitment process.

Phase IV: Validate the Strategies

1) Seek two groups of volunteers, each consisting of at least two students (junior and seniors), faculty, staff (preferably parents with college kids), and student services. If it is possible, include one or two members of the alumni in each group.

2) Present and discuss the five agreed-upon strategies that could be used by the admissions/recruitment officers.

3) Ask each team to summarize the group discussion, suggestions, and recommendation.

4) Bring the two groups together to discuss the summaries.

5) Modify the agreed-upon strategies based on the outcome of the group discussions.

Phase V: Evaluate the Strategies

1) Use the modified strategies from the preceding efforts to recruit potential new students and to educate

prospective students about the institution and/or academic program during the recruitment process.

2) Collect data and qualitative observations about process. Then compare your data and observations with the various recruitment sessions.

3) Make the needed adjustment in the strategies, and apply the process.

Summary and Conclusions

The process of consensus building relies on qualitative input from students, academic staff, and admissions staff to develop a more effective communication process. Often the admissions staff does not have a clear understanding of the value of a program and how a prospective student can truly benefit from choosing the institution/program. Collaboration between admissions representatives and academic staff is essential. Chair/dean involvement in the development of the strategies for delivering information to prospective students is integral. As well we suggest that admissions representatives attend selected academic classes so that they can be truly informed when speaking to new potential students.

Admissions staff and recruitment officers have a tough job and tremendous responsibilities. They first have to stress the value of higher education in and of itself. Next, they must sell why their institution is the best place for the prospective student. Then they must promote the specific programs that their institution offers. Finally, they must market the career opportunities that all of these experiences will provide the potential student upon graduation. This demands the contribution of all the stakeholders.

The recruitment approach outlined in this article helps develop a broader and deeper understanding of why students choose a specific university and its programs. This method of determining consensus relies on knowledge, insights, and opinions. The result most often is a richer understanding of what is needed to make students commit to the institution, determine which program they might find appealing or appropriate, and decide which program can really make a difference for their future success.

This approach is a highly useful and structured means for transforming thinking into desirable outcomes in an efficient way. In order to follow this process, however, egos must be left behind. Participants must be open to taking on a challenge that requires the best minds, ideas, and approaches within the system to come together. This approach helps to inspire those who are involved in the process with the power of clear thinking and the tools to pull off a successful, sustainable collaboration without formal authority. ▲

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Helping Faculty Members Create Successful Résumés

by Jeffrey L. Buller

It seems as though department chairs are always being asked to review someone's résumé. Either there is a new hire to be made or the chair must submit a recommendation about some other major personnel decision, such as promotion, tenure, merit increase, performance appraisal, and the like. Or the chair may be asked to assist a member of the department with improving the format of a résumé that will be submitted with a grant proposal, award application, or request for a publication contract. Most of us are only too glad to help, but what is the most useful advice that department chairs can give a faculty member, particularly one who simply needs a few well-chosen hints that will restructure a perfectly good curriculum vitae and make it truly spectacular? The following suggestions—some of them all too frequently overlooked—can really make a difference to your faculty.

Don't assume that you can only have one form of your curriculum vitae that must be submitted for all purposes. Computers make it extremely easy to maintain a résumé file that contains your pertinent professional and biographical information so that you can pull it together for a specific purpose very quickly. While your curriculum vitae is a factual document (i.e., absolutely everything in it must be accurate, clear, and verifiable), it is also a rhetorical document (i.e., you are submitting it because you are trying to persuade someone of something.) For this reason, every time you are about to create a version of your curriculum vitae, ask yourself...

- "What will someone who examines this document need to know and to conclude in order to say 'yes' to me?"

Once you have a clear answer to that question, you will know immediately how to structure your résumé. In other words, depending on the purpose you are trying to achieve, certain aspects of your achievement will need to be highlighted and certain things minimized or omitted. In applications for promotion and tenure, for instance, most institutions require documentation in three essential categories of performance—teaching, scholarship, and service (although the exact terminology used may differ from institution to institution)—and rely on a résumé, in

The

Department Chair

Winter 2005
Vol. 15
No. 3

A Resource for Academic Administrators

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Teaching and Leading: Rivals or Partners?

by John B. Bennett

In moments of passion we may say that teaching and leading are completely different, but they're not. Whether we teach in business, economics, the sciences, or the humanities, our goals are parallel to those we have when leading. In both cases we seek to make positive differences. Yet we rarely acknowledge that teaching and leading are related—indeed, mutually implicated—activities. We give lip service to the importance of teaching, but few academic traditions celebrate the value of leading. Perhaps exploring the connections between them would help to highlight their relatedness.

Let's examine this possibility by looking at the four topics of collaboration, commonalities, conversation, and hospitality. First, both teaching and leading require collaboration with others since neither can be a solitary activity. Second, in collaborating, we create and identify commonalities, an important value in our diverse world. Third, the best way we construct and find commonalities is through conversation. Fourth, any conversation worth the name involves attending to the other, accompanied by an invitation to reciprocate—that is, it involves practicing hospitality.

Collaboration

First, whether we teach or lead, we desire *collaboration* with others. Unless we understand teaching solely as transmitting information to utterly passive receivers, we seek interactions with our students so that together we improve upon what we understand individually. No one has a lock on knowledge. Far from standing alone as an isolated and unconnected practice, teaching is embedded in a complex structure of relationality. We teach and learn from our students, just as they teach and learn from each other.

Practicing leadership is equally relational. Leaders may plan to provide direction. But if they hope to see that direction followed, much more than a request or command is required. More than the authority that an institutionally bestowed position may provide is involved. Leaders create their personal authority through their person and character. As in teaching, respect for others is required—respect offered generates respect returned.

Effective leading and teaching also require self-insight. Current subject matter or management knowledge is necessary, but hardly sufficient. Indeed, the importance of the person looms larger in good teaching and leading than does pedagogical or management technique. Both leader and teacher need to bring into a personal focus the impersonal principles and abstractions of knowledge—to witness and attest why and how these things matter.

Both teaching and leading suggest the broader point that selves are relational, not atomistic. Each of us is implicated in and connected with the lives of others—both empowered and limited by them. When we feel in a hurry and burdened, we often expect simple acceptance of our teaching or leading—