The practice of distance education embraces a number of activities beyond those that directly involve instruction. Although the distance education literature increasingly is reporting on "ancillary" educational activities, such as student support, little, if any attention has been paid to the possibilities offered by distance education techniques and technologies in the area of student recruitment. This issue of DEOSNEWS offers a description and discussion of a program at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale that used interactive video teleconferencing as a recruitment tool for minority graduate students in the field of Mass Communication and Media Arts.

RECRUITMENT OF MINORITY GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH VIDEO TELECONFERENCING

Anita Fleming-Rife, Assistant Professor  
Department of Journalism and Mass Communications  
University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO, 80639  
aflemin@bentley.UnivNorthCo.EDU

Charles H. Ingold, Associate Professor  
Department of Journalism and Mass Communications  
University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO, 80639

Beverly Love-Wallace, Doctoral Student  
School of Journalism  
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale  
Carbondale, IL 62901

William W. Woodward, Instructor  
Department of Journalism and Mass Communications  
University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO, 80639

INTRODUCTION

Distance education as an objective and as an overall process for providing educational opportunities is often recognized as being more than course delivery. For example, Garrison and Shale write that "provision of student support services" is a characteristic of distance education (1987, 7-8). Rudich’s (1991) discussion of marketing distance education focuses on the importance and practicality of communicating "want-satisfying attributes" of distance education to potential markets. Use of techniques and technology in a variety of interactive endeavors focusing on course content, class discussion, and evaluation has been documented and researched as the practice of distance education has grown. However, the literature sheds little light on how the techniques and technology may serve what might be called "ancillary" needs and
functions such as recruitment of students and support services for students.

Garrison and Shale (1987) refer to the specialization possible with current distance education systems. They call such specialization the "de-massifying" of delivery, and argue that a "future task for education at a distance is to design and direct personalized information to specific target audiences" (p. 13). These authors discuss specialization primarily in relation to program delivery, but the concept of specifying target audiences logically extends to recruitment, which is part of marketing, and to support service needs of distance education, as well. Similarly, Rudich "suggests that satisfied customers (students) are won one at a time" (1991, 37).

USING DISTANCE EDUCATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR RECRUITMENT

How might these philosophies of marketing and specialized targets be applied to recruitment and support service needs of distance education, in practical terms? Recent teleconferencing by a large Midwestern university provides some insight into this question, specifically in terms of recruitment. In 1995, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIU-C) conducted a teleconference with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) aimed at recruiting African-American graduate students for its College of Mass Communication and Media Arts. The objective was to address the problem of how to cost-effectively reach target minority populations in a manner that allowed maximum interface between the institution and potential recruits in lieu of direct personal contact. In particular, teleconferencing was explored as a way that many institutions of higher education might efficiently 1) reach a target minority population, 2) campaign for recruitment among that target population, 3) provide opportunity for interaction between potential students and institutional representatives (for example, enable questions to be answered in a mediated "face-to-face" manner), and 4) provide an opportunity for potential students to get the best view of the campus and its faculty, administrators and students without actually traveling to the campus.

Distance education with satellite video transmissions and interactive telecommunications is used to teach students at a distance. But "distance recruiting" using these increasingly available technologies appears to be unused. While the SIU-C graduate program in mass communication is a campus-based program rather than a distance education program, the distance recruiting utilized by the SIU-C program illustrates the marketing and support service functions that can be served by distance education techniques and technology.

IDENTIFYING AND REACHING THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Minority student recruitment has become a high priority in higher education. In the case of SIU-C's College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, standards of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) state that "minorities . . . are vastly underrepresented in American journalism and mass communications student bodies, and direct journalism educators to make effective efforts to recruit, advise, and retain
minority students . . . ." (1993, 29). Numerous recruitment activities by schools have been documented in the literature. Morton presents a list of two dozen specific activities used to recruit minority and female students by 49 journalism/mass communications units accredited by ACEJMC (1993, 29). These activities range from minority scholarships and administrative functions such as special faculty meetings on minority recruitment, to interpersonal contacts as provided by workshops for students and special "minority days" or events. Some of these activities bring potential recruits to campus, and some provide contact between students and representatives from the institution. Some provide for direct interface between college or university representatives and potential recruits. But many are what might be called "one-way" tactics: grant-writing, "flags" from admissions offices, and institutions imposing goals and quotas on themselves. Notable is the little direct mention of the use of communications technology.

There is little evidence from Morton’s survey that programs in journalism/mass communications employ the very technology that plays such an important part in their study and their professional preparation to meet recruitment objectives. Given the prevalence, in particular, of satellite linkages and teleconferencing opportunities available at many colleges and universities, use of those opportunities to meet recruitment objectives might be expected to figure more prominently than is indicated, at least in mass communication disciplines, by the Morton data. Continued trial of new approaches is thus warranted. Innovative approaches at least should be sought and explored.

HBCUs with journalism and mass communications programs were identified from a study conducted by Paddon and Cobb (1990). By 1982, 70% of the nation’s African-American college students were enrolled in predominantly white institutions (PWIs). But despite this marked increase in enrollments, HBCUs still produced more than half of the degrees earned by African Americans in engineering, mathematics, computer science, physician science and biological science, and 38% of first professional degrees in law, medicine and dentistry. While PWIs produce the majority of African-American graduate students in liberal arts, humanities and social sciences, the trend is reversing as HBCUs are now enrolling African Americans in record numbers and across all academic disciplines. While target populations might be found at other institutions, and for recruitment of minorities other than African-Americans, SIU recognized and targeted this finite set of identifiable schools as a rich source of recruits.

>From a total of 115 HBCUs, potential participant institutions were selected from among those with journalism and mass communication programs which had previously been identified by SIU-C’s College of Mass Communication and Media Arts from the Paddon and Cobb (1990) study. From the _Downlink Directory_ (1994), it was determined which of the schools had downlink satellite capabilities. Because this was a pilot teleconferencing project, the number of participating schools was kept to a minimum. All of the HBCUs with downlink capabilities were initially contacted by telephone in order to ascertain their willingness to participate in a recruitment teleconference by providing an audience of prospective journalism mass communications graduate students. It was explained during that initial phone survey that SIU-C would bear all costs. Ten schools were selected from among the schools with
journalism mass communication programs which also had downlink satellite capabilities. Of the ten schools selected, three declined. One of the declining was originally an HBCU; however, because of changing demographics in that school's vicinity it has become predominantly white. Another school said its students did not need graduate school and it simply did not feel the teleconference would benefit its students. The third declining school offered no reason, leaving seven schools as the initial participating pool.

Upon finalizing a participants list, confirmation of interest and intent was made by telephone, after attempts by mail (via a stamped, self-addressed return postcard) were abandoned because of a low return rate. Answers to three basic questions were obtained by the telephone survey: (1) How many students do you expect to have in the audience? (2) What satellite band (C-band or Ku band) are you on? (3) Which of two possible teleconference air dates would be best for your school? A subsequent mailing provided participating schools with information about admissions requirements for the two departments and one school within the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts; financial assistance (fellowships, assistantships and loans); and housing information.

Based upon input from the participating schools, January 27, 1995, was set as the air date. While that date was late in the school year, it still preceded admissions and financial aid application deadlines. Information had been disseminated to the schools early in the fall so that the students would be aware of deadlines and would not have to wait until the air date to make application. However, even if they waited until the air date to apply, they did not have to wait for the application materials to be sent; they had them in hand. As that date approached, follow-up telephone confirmation calls were made and letters were mailed.

The hour-long live program was co-hosted by the dean of the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts and a journalism doctoral student. The vice-president for Academic Affairs also served as a co-host. The live program incorporated pre-recorded segments interspersed throughout the teleconference. At the beginning of the program, the audience was told that they would have a chance to call in during the second half hour. Periodically, during the first half-hour, the toll-free contact number was flashed on the screen. The pre-recorded segments included vignettes of two former SIU-C African American graduate students and one current graduate student. One of the students profiled was a former journalism doctoral student, now an assistant professor at a medium-sized southern university. Another was a former Radio-Television master's degree student who now owns her own management consulting firm in a major midwestern metropolitan city. The current master's degree student is in cinema and photography. All of the academic units within the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts were represented.

The profiles were produced by a graduate assistant, a doctoral candidate in journalism who worked with the production component of the Department of Radio-Television. The production component, R-T Productions (that team included under-graduate Radio-Television students), provided the footage filmed at remote locations. File footage of the SIU-C campus, College of Mass Communication and Media Arts facilities. and the surrounding community provided
scripted pre-produced packages. The profiles were between two-
and-a-half minutes and three minutes long.

The panel was comprised of the head of the School of Journalism, 
chairs of the Radio-Television and Cinema and Photography 
Departments, the director of Broadcasting services, the dean of the 
Graduate School, and the vice-president for Academic Affairs. The 
panel composition illustrated the level of commitment and interest in 
iminority recruitment at all levels of the university, while at the same 
time showing the relationship between the recruiting departments 
and the overall university. The teleconference was thus not only a 
department or college effort, but a university effort. This unified 
effort was an indirect show of support of the college and the 
departments by upper administrative levels.

Minority graduate student representatives of the departments within 
the college comprised another panel. They articulated their graduate 
school experiences and responded to the phone-in questions. The 
prospective students asked questions about the opportunity for 
hands-on experience, financial aid availability, and even the climatic 
conditions in the region.

COSTS

The costs of this project were not prohibitive. The largest outlay of 
money was for R-T Productions to film at the remote locations, both 
of which were out of state. There were food, lodging and 
transportation expenses for this aspect of the production. However, 
this was a one-time expenditure (the vignettes have a shelf 
life of several years). Other costs incurred included satellite 
time, telephone bridge, pre-production, long-distance telephone 
calls to the schools, and postage. The total costs were a little more 
than $5,000. To further point out the cost-effectiveness of 
teleconferencing as a tool, the broadcasting site can reach 10, 20, 
30 or more schools, all for the same $5,000.

While cost is one consideration, reach is another. By having the 
interactive capability, it was clear that students were on the other 
end. Because they asked questions, they probably were interested at 
a basic level, at least.

SUMMARY

Systematic analysis of the effectiveness of the teleconference in 
increasing inquiries and actual applications for the graduate program 
is not available. Generally, the video-teleconference organizers and 
panelists believe that the pilot project operated as planned and met 
objectives of disseminating information, presenting the components 
of the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, the campus 
and the surrounding community, and of providing for interaction 
between potential recruits and university representatives.

Recruiting at a distance no longer needs to be confined to visits by 
a single representative to campuses, or to expensive, sometimes 
unaffordable, visits by interested students to institutions, or to 
mailed information and recruitment literature. Communications 
technology makes it possible to have a much more encompassing 
reach. In the SIU-C project, video teleconferencing made it
possible to simultaneously reach students at Alcorn State University in Lorman, Mississippi; Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi; Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama; Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama; and Howard University in Washington, DC to name several.

Because of communications technology, schools can now communicate with target populations all across the nation and, potentially, the world. This can be accomplished simultaneously with a large number of prospective students at different locations or through a series of teleconferences. Although many schools do not have satellite technology, an increasing number do (_Downlink Directory_ 1994), and the trend is for that number to increase. As a result, schools of moderate means may be able to compete more effectively with larger schools that have an established tradition of funding recruitment efforts that involve extensive travel and print media use.

The level of participation of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities in SIU-C’s first-ever recruitment video teleconference may be an indication that the use of communications technology for distance recruiting is an idea whose time has come. Applications for the graduate programs processed in the spring of 1995 will provide evidence of the impact of the recruitment video-teleconference. It may be possible to determine (1) whether applications from targeted minorities at HBCUs are significantly greater than in prior years and (2) the role of the video-teleconferencing in any documented increase in applications from the participating HBCUs. As it is possible to tape record teleconference programs, further utility of the recruitment effort can be attained. The participating schools can use the tapes at a later time for viewing by students who were not available for the original programming. The vignettes and much of the pre-recorded, pre-produced material will have a "shelf-life" of several years, thus minimizing the initial cost and time.

SIU-C’s pilot project is an example of what Sulton (1991) said is needed in the way of minority recruitment efforts: extraordinary means. But on the other hand, these means may not be extraordinary at all, just overlooked. Distance recruiting via satellite is simply utilizing the means that for the most part are readily available in journalism and mass communication programs. Teleconferencing programs have promise as a method of empowering schools to compete for recruits generally, and minority recruits specifically. By utilizing video-teleconferencing as a means to recruit minorities, institutions can meet accreditation standards and, more importantly, can achieve the inclusion of underrepresented populations in higher education.

REFERENCES


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