THE CAL POLY SAN LUIS OBISPO’S “LINKING THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY TO PROSPECTS AND APPLICANTS”

Overview
Public universities have become increasingly aware of the need to adequately plan and access their recruitment and admission-related activities. Many have realized you can no longer rely on your past actions to guide your future. Most institutions, especially those that have moved away from the “body for a dollar approach” to their admission planning activities realize that recruitment and admission is a complex activity involving many factors which influence students to initially apply and enroll at any given university. This is especially true of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

With the downward trend in applicants during the early nineties, Cal Poly decided it needed to change the way it did business in order to maintain the favorable position it had during the 1980’s in the market place. With this in mind, the University merged the Office of Admissions and University Outreach Services, and established the following goals for our recruitment and admission efforts.

Goals/Objectives
Cal Poly decided that they wanted to utilize the various technologies available to us to “link” the campus community to prospective students and applicants throughout the recruitment and admission process. The University had a number of successful outreach and recruitment activities in place; however, the University did not have the necessary “link in place” to provide highly sophisticated interaction between the campus and prospective students. The Unit immediately began improving and enhancing the utilization of technology to support recruitment, application processing, and most importantly, the assessment efforts of its recruitment and admission-related efforts.

Our primary objectives were simple - we wanted to involve the entire campus including the president, deans, department chairs, student clubs, and alumni association in the following efforts:

- To develop our prospect pools
- To communicate with applicants as they progress through a competitive admission process to convince candidates that the selection of our product (over that of our competition) was of particular benefit
- To entice newly admitted students to enroll
- To support advising, orientation, and registration as part of the new student experience

Technology Available
We quickly realized that our Student Information System was a key component to the success of this project and decided we would utilize our S.I.S. to store, drive, and analyze the various efforts we were developing as part of our admission marketing plan. We also realized that our LAN gave us the capability to develop an integrated system that would allow the entire campus community to communicate with prospective students in a highly personalized and cost-effective way. We decided to create a campus hub that capitalized on existing and new technology to drive all our campus communication efforts focusing directly at the students we wanted to apply and eventually enroll. We positioned ourselves to be able to develop and implement many of the new software technologies available to us to support the rapid changes ahead in the recruitment and enrollment efforts of our new students. We adopted the following tools: Electronic Viewbooks, Electronic Application (XAP), World-Wide Web, and CD Rom Recruiters that have been highly effective in how we do
business. In fact, we have processed over 20,000 electronic applications for admission in the last four years. However, the key to all these actions was the development of the campus communication hub which we named our “RESPONSE” system.

**RESPONSE**
The RESPONSE hub provides our University the tools to involve the entire campus in the recruitment and enrollment of our new students. It also provides Cal Poly with the opportunity to measure the effectiveness of the campus' recruitment-related activities which are necessary to be responsive to the evolving demographic, administrative and curricular concerns which result in the enrollment of a student population appropriate to the mission of this campus. RESPONSE offers the following features:

- **An on-line integrated system (RESPONSE) that streamlines the flow of written communications directly to the students Cal Poly is interested in enrolling.**
  Our experience has been that immediate and direct contact with prospective students reduces the burden on high school and community college counselors and is a much more positive experience for our prospective students.

- **An on-line capability to readily assess successful recruitment activities occurring.** Since our initial development in September, 1993, we have developed 230 different prospecting sources and have loaded over 200,000 qualified prospect contacts to our database. We have seen our applicant pool increase 40% over the last three years, reversing a three-year downward trend in applicants, and have also seen improvements made to our goals of recruiting a high quality diverse new student population to our campus.

- **An on-line capability for all campus departments such as the President's Office, College Deans, Department Chairs, Student Affairs Directors, student clubs and the Office of Admissions to communicate with prospective students and applicants in a highly personalized fashion with minimal staff support.** Each communication piece is customized and generated through this automated system.

- **An on-line capability to provide timely communication messages to applicants proceeding through the application cycle.** Students are kept informed of missing documents and requirements, as well as continually provided information on diagnostic testing requirements, advising, orientation and registration processes, all in a personalized fashion.

**Developing Prospecting Sources**
After we developed RESPONSE, we developed an enrollment funnel that supported this campuses’ position in the marketplace. We labeled our funnel as follows:

- SUSPECTS
- PROSPECTS
- PRE-APPS
- APPS
- ADMITTED
- CONFIRMED
- ENROLLED

With our suspects we created a specific campus-based communication flow and developed supporting advertising campaigns to support this recruitment process.

**Sources and Interests**
Four distinct recruitment campaigns were devised and supporting time sequence flow of campus-wide communication developed.
We decided to track in our database every contact the institution had with prospective students, from our downtown store to our electronic CD Rom Recruiter, our campus is communicating with over 230 different prospecting sources. Each source is tied to a specific advertising and communications campaign.

We also decided it was important for us to track all prospective student interests: we track their major interest of study, extra-curricular activities, athletic interest, musical instrument played, and even what type of computer they have, and we store this information in our communications flow. A sample communication flow follows:

**Prospect Flow Sample**

Campaign 1 Flow

- Congratulations Letter/Teaser
- Teaser Return
- Letter/Viewbook
- Department Letter/Fact Sheet/Invite to Apply

Campaign 2 Flow

- Letter/Viewbook
- Department Letter/Fact Sheet
- Department Invite to Apply

**Applicants**

As a highly competitive campus, we thought it was crucial to provide as much information to our applicant pool as possible, especially as our candidates proceed through the admissions process.

Our goal was to make sure our applicant pool received accurate and timely information on the process, faculty interacted with them throughout the process, missing requirements were called to their attention and any specialized processing needs addressed. A sample applicant flow follows:
Applicant Flow Chart

Thank You Letters

Department Letters

Missing Document Letters

Residency

Application Fees

EOP

Veteran’s Status

Undecided Major

Admitted Student Flow

Obviously our greatest concern was enrolling the right type of new student mix at Cal Poly. With this in mind, we focused a great deal of support and effort to involving everyone in welcoming our new students to the University. The following is a sample of our new student flow of communications from our campus to the students who have been offered admission based on the competitive nature of our selection process. Again, each piece of information is strategically sent at time sequences that are important to our effort.

Admitted Student Flow Chart

Acceptance Letter

Welcome Packet

Presidential Welcome Letter

Dean/Department Chairperson Welcome Letter

Open House Letter From College Deans

Follow-up Letters

Week of Welcome

Financial Aid Acknowledgment

Academic Placement Information

Academic Advising Information

Registration Information
Developing the Advertising Pieces
In order for the communication flow to be effective, we needed to develop a number of different advertising pieces to support this effort.

We attempted to help the University understand the need of focusing on one theme throughout all our publications. We adopted a Cal Poly theme to all our publications, moving all the various advertising tools to adopt a “Cal Poly” approach to this effort. We helped move the campus to realize the strength in our institutional identity.

In developing our theme, we concentrated on our known strengths as a polytechnic university, and our wonderful location in San Luis Obispo, and moved all pieces to focus on our high quality faculty and programs at our established price.

We created a building block approach to all our advertising tools that includes post cards, teaser pieces, viewbooks, posters, departmental fact sheets, residence hall information, financial aid information and a Chamber of Commerce publication.

Assessment
The decision to link all prospecting efforts with the Student Information System allows us to evaluate and assess all efforts associated with recruitment. (A future paper will follow about the types of market and applicant assessment studies currently taking place.)

Future
We are currently expanding the RESPONSE hub to allow us to develop some of the exciting features available through the Internet. We hope to have this in place soon.

About the author
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