SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE: THE MARKETING

AND PROMOTION OF ALABAMA

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

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ABSTRACT

Recruiters and marketers within the Alabama Community College System are tasked with increasing enrollment at their institutions. The methods of accomplishing this goal include traditional strategies as well as new and emerging ones. Unlike personnel at other institutions of higher learning, however, community college recruiters and marketers have a unique mission that shapes their promotional strategies. Community colleges have historically tried to offer "something for everyone" as part of their programming. With limited resources, recruiters and marketers at Alabama community colleges must often decide if providing generic messages that reach the largest number of potential students will provide better results than targeted messages to the many diverse populations historically served by the community college.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. The study examined strategies such as marketing to a diverse group of students balanced with developing focused messages which speak to individual needs. Some questions to consider were:

1. How do college employees collaborate across organizational departments to develop marketing and recruiting messages;

2. How do community colleges utilize formal marketing and recruiting plans to reach potential students; and

3. What are the marketing and recruiting messages being sent by the institutions?

This qualitative study examined the experiences and perceptions of key community college employees responsible for the development and practice of marketing and recruiting for

their institutions, and currently enrolled students at their colleges. The key employees included

the president, public information officer, and recruiter. Additionally, document analysis and a

review of social media outlets examined the development and practice of marketing and

recruiting at the community colleges involved in the study.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Jim and Nancy Franklin, who gave me the opportunities to learn lessons in education, love, and life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finally, to my friend Nakia Robinson. To quote Francis Mulcahy, "Look on the bright side: When they tell us to serve our time in *Purgatory*, we can say, no thanks, I've done mine." After this is all over, I will have a few extra letters behind my name, but what is more important, I will have a friend for life.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

The primary responsibility for recruiters and marketers within the Alabama Community

College System may seem obvious to the general public: to increase enrollment at their

institutions. The methods of accomplishing this goal include traditional strategies as well as new

and emerging ones. Unlike personnel at other institutions of higher learning, however,

community college recruiters and marketers have a unique mission that shapes their promotional

strategies. Community colleges have historically tried to offer "something for everyone" as part

of their programming. To an institution that tries to offer something for everyone, everyone is a

potential student (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Current enrollment data might indicate that the unlimited student prospects have resulted

in record enrollment. Many community colleges across the nation have seen their enrollment

numbers rise close to 25 percent in just two years (Mullin & Kent, 2009). Numerous colleges

within the Alabama Community College System have also reported record enrollment during

that same time period. Recruiters and marketers may assume that their efforts and their

institutions' offerings are solely responsible for the impact on the current enrollment numbers,

but reports indicate that the current economic climate has influenced the increase in students

(Mullin & Kent, 2009).

On a national level, before the economic downturn began in September 2008, other

factors were occurring to increase community college enrollment. According to Cohen and

Brawer (2003), factors such as general population expansion; an increase in older student

enrollment; additional financial aid opportunities; more part-time students; reclassification of institutions; the redefinition of students and courses; and increased attendance of specific demographics such as women and minorities led to enrollment increases (p. 38-39). These factors provide support to the idea that, to reach all their potential students, community college recruiters and marketers must employ a strategy of marketing a message that appeals to all potential students.

What may not be evident, though, is how marketing professionals are preparing for the time when economic and other factors change and enrollment numbers decrease. What plans and strategies are being formulated to develop additional messages for potential community college students? Utilizing one message in one medium is not sufficient any longer given the diversity of community college students and institutional programs. It is important for community college professionals to adjust their marketing strategies to communicate their messages effectively to their diverse student population (Absher & Crawford, 1996). Information for specific targets should be developed. Marketing plans should include messages on how an institution's educational opportunities and services help students meet their individual needs (Wonacott, 2001).

This struggle to design overarching messages to specific individuals is a constant conflict for community college professionals charged with developing marketing strategies. Developing messages that highlight an institution's low tuition may appeal to students at a specific time when the economy is struggling, but that same message may have less impact on a potential student's choice when factors change and shift. Developing a marketing message that speaks only to one demographic could have the potential threat of not making a connection with their intended audience. Adding to the already complicated task of developing the message and

deciding on who will receive it is how the message will be relayed. Limited resources at institutions may cause some community colleges to rely on traditional means of marketing and recruiting rather than presenting messages with new and emerging forms of communication through social media. Community colleges may appeal to many segments of all populations, but the benefits will be lost on the individual if the message is presented in too broad a sense.

Community college personnel in Alabama and the students they serve can benefit from a study which examines these issues. The need for research on this topic is high given that most enrollment studies focusing on recruitment and marketing concentrate on four-year institutions rather than community colleges. Because of my past history working as both a recruiting and marketing professional in the Alabama Community College Association, my intent with this study was to examine the issue in order to aid college staff in their marketing and recruiting strategies. As a beginning to this research, the purpose and research questions guiding this study are detailed. Additionally, further information about the unique mission and structure of the American community college, as well as the history of the Alabama Community College System is offered. Finally, a framework for the following chapters concentrating on the literature involved in this study and the methods of research is presented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. It was important to examine these factors due to the traditional role community colleges have as an open access system of higher learning. Without an examination of recruiting and marketing strategies, community college personnel run the risk of not effectively reaching the prospective students who would benefit from attending their institutions. The colleges can also benefit from effective marketing and

recruiting. Targeted marketing and recruiting can increase enrollment, which in turn increases revenue for the colleges at a time when budget reductions are a constant threat. The study examined strategies such as marketing to a diverse group of students balanced with developing focused messages designed which speak to individual needs.

Technical colleges provide more offerings in career education without an emphasis on academic transfer classes found more at the traditional community college. Because the mission of Alabama's community colleges is broader than the ones found at technical colleges and other institutions that comprise the community college system, the focus of the study was limited to Alabama's community colleges. In addition, since the research is limited in this area in regards to community colleges, and especially in regards to community colleges in Alabama, it is the intent of this study to begin a new direction for others to further investigate the effectiveness of marketing within the Alabama Community College System.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. Using data collected from personal interviews and content analyses of marketing materials from three selected Alabama community colleges, this study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do college employees collaborate across organizational departments to develop marketing and recruiting messages;

2. How do community colleges utilize formal marketing and recruiting plans to reach potential students; and

3. What are the marketing and recruiting messages being sent by the institutions?

Traditional Mission of the American Community College

Because the purpose for this research is tied closely to the historical mission of the American community college and to the Alabama Community College System in particular, it is beneficial to examine the historical context of each. Providing accessible and inclusive education to diverse groups of people has long been the goal of American community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Given the range of degrees offered and the diversity of its students, the American community college provides an educational opportunity that is unique to American higher education. The mission of the American two-year college historically has included distinct opportunities for its students, the two largest areas for opportunities being academic transfer and career technical education (Voorhees, 2001). Cohen and Brawer (2008) identified five functions of the modern community college. They include academic transfer, vocational-technical training, continuing education, developmental education, and community service.

Through these five traditional functions, the community college as an educational institution serves the needs of its students. However, because the community college serves so many types of students, the needs of the individual, or in this context, the target market, must be considered. Cohen and Brawer (2008) noted that what community colleges really provide is a system for individuals. The individuals may focus on one or more of the traditional functions of the community college, and, in some instances, all five, but more realistically, students focus on their specific requirements. They develop educational goals and objectives based on these particular needs. Whether it is for academic transfer, career education, or some other motivation, trying to classify individual needs in order to create broad marketing messages can be difficult.

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), assessments to classify community college students together have been conducted through a variety of views:

To the psychologist, community college students are pragmatic, little concerned with learning for its own sake. They are not self-directed or self-motivated; they need to be instructed. To the sociologist, the students are struggling to escape from their lower class backgrounds; some do, but many inhibited by a bias against leaving family and friends that a move in class would engender. To the economist, students from low-income families pay more in the form of forgone earnings as a percentage of total family income than their counterparts from higher-income groups, a differential that more than offsets the savings gained by attending a low-tuition institution. To the political scientist, students attending community colleges are given short shrift because the institutions are funded at a lower per capita level than the universities, and hence the students do not have equivalent libraries, laboratories, or faculty-student ratios available to them. (p. 54)

Although all of these perspectives can assist in some way with classifying the community college student, they do not always help to understand who the students are. Understanding student demographics can assist in developing what messages motivate individuals to enroll.

The traditional message of programs for all students easily can be applied when viewing the historical mission of the American community college. Opportunities to communicate this message are abundant when focusing on the many roles a community college can play in the life of a student. Because of the diversity found at community colleges, those tasked with marketing community colleges have learned to direct their messages to as many people as possible. When community colleges aggressively recruit students to an institution which promotes open access, everyone becomes a potential student (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). It becomes easier to direct the broad message to everyone, rather than to target a specific message to those individuals who would benefit more from one of the aspects found in one of the five identified missions.

Although the mission of the American community college and the message to promote it may be classified as traditional, the American community college student cannot. The only thing typical about the average community college student is that none are typical. Age, gender, race, socioeconomic standing, and other demographic classifications are more widespread in community colleges than in any other American higher education institution. Recent studies

verify that more nontraditional learners are returning to higher education for a multitude of

reasons. In the last six years, 38.1% of college students in degree-seeking, credit-bearing

programs were older than 24 years of age (*Chronicle Almanac,* 2004), but including the number

of adults in non-credit skills training or continuing education programs, the proportion of adults

participating in postsecondary studies is even greater.

One of the more prevalent definitions of nontraditional learners is provided by the

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). In the NCES report entitled *Trends in*

Enrollment (1996), a nontraditional student is identified by the presence of one or more of the

following seven characteristics or identifiers:

1.   delayed enrollment into postsecondary education;

2.   part-time attendance;

3.   financially independent;

4.   worked full-time while enrolled;

5.   had dependents other than a spouse;

6.   was a single parent; and/or

7.   did not obtain a standard high school diploma.

Nontraditional students can be categorized further as being minimally nontraditional by

possessing only one characteristic from the defining list. They can be moderately nontraditional

by possessing two or three characteristics from the NCES list. Or, a student may be highly

nontraditional by possessing four or more characteristics from the defining criteria.

According to the NCES Special Analysis Report from 2002, a non-traditional student may

actually be the norm rather than the exception. Fully three-fourths of all postsecondary students

in 1999-2000 had at least one nontraditional characteristic. The most non-traditional students are

found at community colleges. According to the report, the most highly nontraditional students (those with four or more markers from the NCES list) were concentrated in public two-year institutions. Among highly nontraditional students, 64% attended a public two-year college.

<center>**History and Mission of the Alabama Community College**</center>

The community colleges of the Alabama Community College System closely follow the traditional role of two-year colleges, both in terms of their missions and their marketing strategies. The history of the system provides insight into how its mission has evolved and adapted to meet the needs of its students.

There were foundations laid for the system in the early twentieth century, but it would take the efforts of state politicians almost 50 years to create the state's postsecondary system (Katsinas, 2003). Although the Alabama School of Trade was established in Gadsden, Alabama, in 1925, the state's two-year system did not begin to take form until 1958. That year, the Alabama Education Commission appointed a subcommittee to explore ways to meet a perceived crisis facing college enrollment in Alabama (Katsinas, 1994). Chester Hartwig, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Auburn University, predicted that a greater percentage of high school graduates would be attending college, so to address this projected need, the Alabama Education Commission recommended that the state create the two-year college system (Wade, 2002). *Legislative Act Number 888* passed September 8, 1961, establishing a junior college in three Alabama Counties (Wade, 2002). Additional colleges were approved at that time but did not materialize. By January 1963, subsequent legislative acts had created a total of ten postsecondary trade schools, seven for whites, and three for blacks in segregated Alabama (Katsinas, 1994).

Almost a year after *Legislative Act Number 888* was passed, the governance system of the newly created system was formed. The Alabama State Board of Education passed a resolution on July 18, 1962, that placed itself in charge of the operation of the two-year college system (Katsinas, 1994). The resolution authorized the establishment of junior colleges in certain areas of the state and appropriated public funds to private junior colleges as well. According to Harold Wade, former president of Western State Community College, to ensure a successful system of public community colleges, "steps were taken to assure that these colleges were located in areas where need existed, and that a plan of orderly development and operation be promulgated immediately" (Wade, 2002, slide 6).

Many people have given former Alabama Governor George Wallace credit for the establishment of Alabama's two-year college system (Katsinas, 1994). While much of the credit should be given to Wallace, there were others involved in the process as well. One person was House Speaker Pro-Tem Rankin Fite. Fite proposed the creation of the Trade School and Junior College Authority to Wallace, suggesting that the new program be funded through a two-cent beer tax (Katsinas, 1994). Wallace approved the plan, and in April 1963, he appeared before the Alabama State Board of Education and asked the Board to conduct an objective study and locate possible sites for junior colleges (Wade, 2002).

The results of the committee produced three legislative acts. The first act, drafted by Fite, *Act 92,* provided for raising revenue through the tax on beer; *Act 93* established a public corporation to be known as the Alabama Trade School and Junior College Authority (ATSJCA), whose members consisted of the governor, state superintendent of education, and the finance director; and *Act 94* provided authority to the Alabama State Board of Education for the

management and control of Alabama's two-year colleges (Wade, 2002). The management and control of the two-year college system lie with the State Board of Education still today.

The Board consists of nine members, with the governor serving as the president of the Board due to his or her office (*Serving People*, 2007). The governor's role on the Board is more or less that of an ex-officio member. The remaining members are elected from eight districts throughout the state (*Serving People*, 2007). State Board of Education members serve four-year terms. The Board elects a vice president pro tempore from among its members annually. The vice-president conducts all the business meetings (*Serving People*, 2007). Monthly public work sessions and meetings are held in Montgomery, Alabama, and, at times, in the eight board districts to discuss and to act on system business (*Serving People*, 2007).

A significant change to the governance system occurred in 1982. That year, a bill was introduced in the legislature called the "Chancellor Bill." It provided for a chancellor to the chief executive officer for the Alabama two-year college system (Wade, 2002). The chancellor, with the Board's approval, has the "authority and responsibility for the operation, management, control, supervision, maintenance, regulation, improvement, and enlargement of each of the colleges" (*Serving People*, 2007). The presidents of the institutions that make up the two-year college system are recommended by the chancellor and approved by the State Board of Education. Presidents serve at the pleasure of the Board. The president is responsible for operating the college with the State Board of Education policy and all applicable state and federal laws (*Serving People*, 2007). The president also hires all personnel at the colleges including those tasked with marketing and promoting the institutions and their missions and offerings.

Alabama Community College System Current Data

In the 50 years since the system was established, numerous institutions have been founded and closed through reorganizations and mergers. Today, the Alabama Community College System, with a mixture of career technical and academic transfer offerings for students, still offers a variety of programs to a diverse student population. At the time of this study, the system was comprised of 21 community colleges, four technical colleges, one military institute, one upper division institute, and one workforce development institution, Alabama Industrial Development Training, and the Alabama Technology Network. Its mission is to "provide a unified system of institutions dedicated to excellence in delivering academic education, adult education, and workforce development" (*About ACCS*, 2010).

These three areas of academic transfer, adult education, and workforce development, have become the three tenets of the system within the last two years. Each has a measured value of importance and each is used in the creation of messages that promote the entire system. Community colleges within the system are encouraged to use these three areas in developing their own institutional message. These three components of the system's mission are often used together to enhance the message that the system and its institutions can offer programs for all students. The offering of academic transfer courses gives students the preparation for transfer to four-year institutions to continue or complete their baccalaureate degree; adult education offers a focus on improved skills, productivity, and training with GED preparation and testing, basic skills, and English as a second language; workforce development training offers customized, flexible, short-term training that is not only responsive to the needs of industry, but prepares potential workers for employment (*About ACCS*, 2010).

Much like the traditional mission of the American community college, the Alabama Community College System promotes accessibility and affordability for its students. The Alabama Community College Systems' commitment to access

> is characterized by statewide geographical locations, open enrollment, and low cost tuition as well as a variety of programs and services that remove barriers to college entrance, education pathways and workforce training opportunities. (*About ACCS*, n.d.)

Each local community college can set its own guidelines for tuition and fees based on the pre-determined range set forth and adopted by the State Board of Education. The average annual tuition and fees amount for 2007 was $2,735 ("About ACCS," n.d.) By 2010, the average tuition and fees had increased to $3,120 ("About ACCS," n.d.).

According to enrollment statistics, the Alabama Community College System served 102,101 credit students in the 2010-11 academic year, with an additional 147,968 non-credit students, making it the largest higher education system in the state (Alabama Community College System, 2012). The average age of the students was 25. Women comprised 60% of those enrolled compared to 40% of men. Minority students made up 34% of the total enrollment (Alabama Community College System, 2012). An overwhelming majority of students were Alabama residents. Enrollment statistics appear in Table 1.

Table 1

Alabama Community College Student Enrollment Statistics for Academic Year 2010 -11

Item	Credit Students	Non-Credit Students
Total Enrollment	102,101	147,968
Average age	27.47	N/A
Females students	60%	N/A
Male students	40%	N/A
Minority students	34%	N/A

N/A=Data not available.

Organization and Culture of the Community College

For many community colleges, limited resources and staff have caused administrators to rely on college employees to take on added responsibilities and duties. Marketing and recruiting personnel are no different. Many marketing professionals are asked by their supervisors to "do more with less" and some are tasked with duties for which their education and experience have not prepared them (Henderson, 1998). If the organizational culture of a community college can be described as a pyramid, then most of the resources are directed at the top (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

For community colleges, the organizational structure is often described as a bureaucratic model (Birnbaum, 1988). According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), this model "presents the college as a formal structure with defined patterns of activity that relate to the functions spelled out in law and policy decisions" (p. 104). Each employee is perceived as a specialist in his or her role in the college. The institution functions as a machine. If one employee is unable to

fulfill his or her role within the overall machine, a new employee will take the place of the old one, and if the machine is working correctly, there will not be a noticeable change in the performance of any employees or the institution as a whole (Birnbaum, 1988).

This model provides employees with restrictions in terms of seeing the larger responsibilities of their duties. Because of this, community college administrators are not embroiled in the "complexities of the moment" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 105). Following this pattern can lead community college managers to not see the emerging need for targeted messages needed to recruit a diverse student population, and instead rely on the traditional messages used by institutions to promote the idea that community colleges have something for everyone. It can also stifle the need for assessment related to how their marketers and recruiters promote their colleges. Even though it relies on the use of data to make decisions, the bureaucratic model does not allow for reevaluation if the hierarchy sees merit in the traditional operations of the institution (Birnbaum, 1988).

In the bureaucratic model, the hierarchy has the final decision. Information and decisions are made at the top and flow down to the bottom through the delegation of authority, and the employees react accordingly (Birnbaum, 1988). Employees are assigned spaces on a tightly controlled organizational chart, and there is very little overlap of duties; therefore, there is very little opportunity for interaction among college employees. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), "the bureaucratic model is most applicable to community colleges because the institutions are organized hierarchically and compromises among contending forces chart their directions" (p.105). The authors further suggest that community colleges are social organizations with their own rules, and the idea that a participatory model can work there is uncertain.

If the institutions in which the marketers and recruiters cannot be collaborative, then it becomes essential that they be part of a larger group in which a participatory model can exist. Professional development organizations can provide this for community college employees. Beginning in the 1990s, professional development organizations began to examine competencies for their members and strengthen their commitment to increasing professional preparation, certification, accreditation, and credentialing (Henderson, 1998). For marketers and recruiters in the Alabama Community College System, their professional development organization, the Alabama Community College System Public Relations Association (ACCSPRA), provides the collaborative conduit which can be missing from their more machinelike and bureaucratic institutional cultures.

Alabama Community College System Public Relations Association (ACCSPRA)

A review of the membership directory of ACCSPRA revealed a wide variety of titles for the membership. Some of the titles for individuals who had been designated as their college's marketing representative included public relations and marketing specialist, director of public relations and community affairs, director of promotions and marketing, director of media relations, coordinator of college relations, director of development, director of public information, director of marketing and communication, and assistant to the president for public affairs, community relations and special events (*Membership Directory*, 2010). These varied titles show that there is little commonality in how marketing professionals are described within the system and in this professional development organization.

The association was formed in 1990 by public relations professionals in the system, known then as the Alabama College System. According to ACCSPRA's *Constitution* (2010), the purpose of the association is

- to enhance the image, strengthen, and promote awareness and public perception of the system;

- to afford opportunities for networking and enhanced professional relationships among its colleagues;

- to provide opportunities for effective cooperation and interchange of information among its members;

- to promote professional standards and ethical conduct in the administration of member duties and responsibilities; and

- to sponsor seminars and other educational activities beneficial to the membership.

These other activities usually take the form of professional development meetings and conferences.

For the past two years, the association has recognized a member as Communicator of the Year. Nominations for the award are solicited from the association's membership. Each nominee is then asked to submit supporting documents to support his or her nomination. An independent panel of judges comprised of media professionals selects the recipients. Beginning in 2011, a professional development stipend accompanied the award. The Communicator of the Year is presented at the association's annual conference.

The annual conference for ACCSPRA is held each summer. The current officers of the organization are responsible for the planning of the conference and can include multiple topics that would appeal to the membership, or they may focus the conference on one topic discussed by a variety of speakers, usually outside of the membership. In addition to the annual summer conference, a spring workshop may be held. The topics of this one-day workshop generally are more concise than the summer conference and have provided more opportunity for practical application during the workshop rather than the theoretical discussion found at the larger annual conference.

Although not organized formally by ACCSPRA officers, members are also encouraged to submit workshops to the Alabama Community College Association's annual conference. This conference is the system's single, largest professional development activity and provides ACCSPRA with an additional opportunity to meet since many of its members are already in attendance at the conference. These workshops are strictly internal. They provide the ACCSPRA membership with the opportunity to present seminars themselves and to take the lead in conducting sessions dealing with the duties of marketing and communication professionals at system institutions.

Although the term, public relations, is a part of the association's name, ACCSPRA is not exclusive to just those professionals. According to Article II of the association's *Constitution*, membership in ACCSPRA is open to Alabama Community College System personnel involved in public relations, marketing, advertising, recruiting, community relations, alumni affairs, and development (*Constitution*, 2010). This wide list of categories allows for multiple members from one institution to be a part of the association.

Summary and Framework

This study investigated how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. Given the limited resources, the traditional mission of the community colleges, and the dominant organizational culture in the American community college, it would be easy to assume that marketing and recruiting professionals rely on the same methods and strategies that the profession has employed in the past to achieve similar results. Engaging in targeted marketing which mutual benefits colleges and the students they try to recruit becomes more important in a time when budgets are threatened and resources are reduced. The recent record enrollment, along with new available recruiting techniques, will

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arguably have an impact on how community college marketers and recruiters promote their institutions in the future. Examination of all of these issues provide the groundwork for improving the current situation in recruiting students to the community college.

In the next chapter, an examination of relevant literature associated with the study will be presented. Included is a historical perspective of marketing and recruiting within the profession of higher education contrasting the different institutions with the efforts of community colleges. A basis for some of the marketing concepts that are often misunderstood within any context, but especially higher education, will also be detailed. Also included is information on the many new and emerging techniques utilized through social media by higher education professionals for the recruiting of students and marketing of their institutions. Finally, a context for the application of much of this examination, specifically as it relates to higher education and to community colleges in particular, will be offered.

Chapter III includes the methodological framework of the study. The chapter details how the study was conducted and outlines the methods used for learning more about marketing and recruiting within the Alabama Community College System. Chapter IV presents the results of the study. It presented the major themes identified. Chapter V included the recommendation and implications which came from the research.

CHAPTER II:

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the opportunities for higher education increased for Americans in the second half of the twentieth century, so did the competition to recruit students (Kirp, 2003). Four-year colleges and universities no longer had the advantage of being the only postsecondary option for students. The variety of institutional types, programs, and methods of delivery broadened students' options and influenced their educational choices (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The rise of the community college as an educational choice, with its lower tuition and less selective admission policies, directly impacted the four-year colleges and universities that once had the good fortune to be in the dominant position as the place to receive a higher education in this country. This increase in competition, coupled with the decrease in traditional-aged prospective students, lead many in higher education to aggressively adopt marketing and recruiting strategies once found only in the private business sector (Antcil, 2008).

In the last 20 years, higher education administrators at two-year institutions have been confronted with some of the same issues their four-year counterparts faced earlier. They have begun to recognize the need to reevaluate how they recruit students and market their institutions' programs and mission (Antcil, 2008). Despite institutional type, both two-year and four-year institutions have recognized that to stay competitive among the many higher education options which exist today, colleges and universities must develop marketing and recruiting strategies that deliver effective messages in a manner that is received positively in order to reach their intended audience. The development of these strategies is assisted in the adoption of a formal marketing plan. Blackburn (1998) wrote that in the last 20 years, the use of formal marketing plans in

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colleges has increased substantially, but the overall effectiveness of the plans has not been reported. The lack of reporting hinders higher education professionals in terms of strategy development because a basis for sharing best practices has not been established.

As stated in Chapter I, the primary purpose of this study was to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. Using data collected from personal interviews and content analyses of marketing materials from selected Alabama community colleges, this study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1.   How do college employees collaborate across organizational departments to develop marketing and recruiting messages;

2.   How do community colleges utilize formal marketing and recruiting plans to reach potential students; and

3.   What are the marketing messages being sent by the institutions?

The objective of this literature review is to frame the formation of a marketing plan for community college professionals by connecting the six components of Blackburn's (1998) suggested marketing plan to the existing literature. Each component is strengthened with examples to provide better understanding of its importance in higher education, and, more specifically, in community colleges.

The six components include the following:

1.   Developing a market audit and market goal development;

2.   Analyzing market opportunity;

3.   Setting market objectives;

4.   Developing and stating market strategies;

5.   Implementing the plan; and

6.   Assessing the plan.

An illustration of the plan and its components appears in Figure 1.
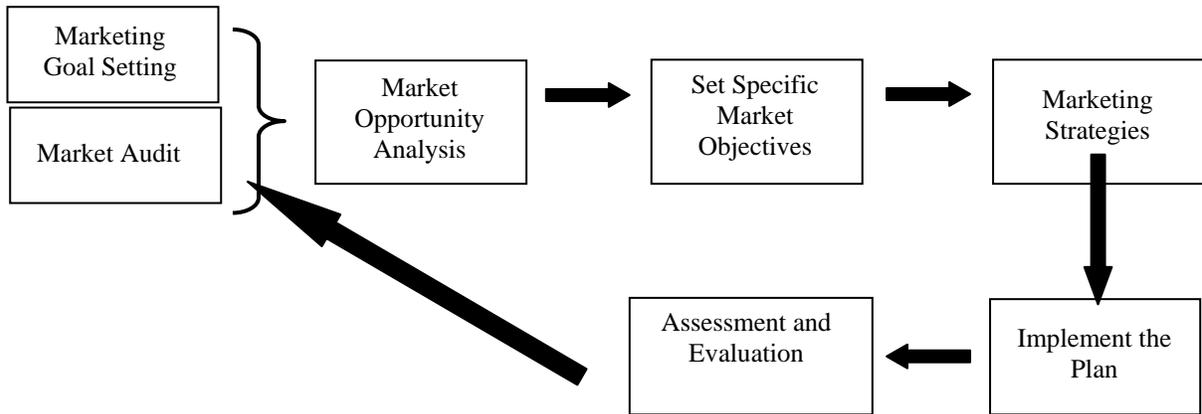
Figure 1. Cyclical marketing plan showing the six stages of the admissions/marketing planning process. Adapted from "The Development of a Marketing Plan," by J. C Blackburn, 1998, Handbook for the College Admissions Professional, pp. 107-125. Copyright 1998 by Greenwood Press.

Guiding Framework

According to Michael and Hogard (1996), the "intent of marketing should be to inform"

(p. 3). Difficulty in understanding this concept arises when trying to identify appropriate

strategies relating to how to inform, who to inform, and what to inform. Given the unique mix of

programs and students served at Alabama's community colleges and the sometimes-limited

resources, administrators face complex decisions in developing marketing strategies.

Developing plans for marketing and recruiting strategies assists in reaching specific enrollment

goals.   Some plans developed specifically for education share characteristics which are basic in

any plan that has its roots in traditional marketing plans. Michael and Hogard outlined five

components for a marketing strategic plan for Adult Literacy programs. These components

included

1. defining a mission statement;

2. developing measurable program objectives;

3. identifying distinct marketing segments;

4. developing a marketing mix of specific programs for specific market segments; and

5. conducting promotional activities tailored to target segments.

Although the five components identified were designed for adult literacy programs, some degrees of common characteristics exist with the traditional mission of the American community college, but the plan is more focused on one area more than other educational plans.

More specific to higher education, but not exclusive to community colleges, is Blackburn's (1998) process for developing a marketing plan for enrollment management. In his plan, Blackburn outlined six components for college administrators to follow. These components included

1. developing a market audit and market goal development;

2. analyzing market opportunity;

3. setting market objectives;

4. developing and stating market strategies and tactics;

5. implementing the marketing plan; and

6. assessing the marketing plan.

The components are stages and are equally important.

In developing the market audit and goals, Blackburn (1998) explained that the audit involves determining where an institution is in terms of audiences it wishes to reach. For example, how many freshmen are being recruited? Based on the audit, market goal setting will

determine the strategies to be employed. A market audit determines where an institution is and the market goal-setting identifies where the institution wants to be (p. 109).

Once the difference has been determined, the market opportunity analysis can take place. The analysis can determine the opportunities for an institution and examine its strengths and weaknesses. Opportunities can occur using the traditional four "Ps" of marketing—price, place, promotion, and product (Blackburn, 1998). In terms of higher education, the price is the tuition for a student's education, the place is how the education is delivered (i.e., traditional delivery or distance education), the promotion is how the information about an institution's offerings is delivered, and the product can be expanded to other aspects of the institution, specifically, what curricular and extracurricular aspects the institution has to offer students.

Next in the plan is setting market objectives. Blackburn (1998) argued that if a market analysis identifies unmet markets, not all of these needs can or should be met, and institutions should not set market objectives based on these unmet markets just to enroll additional students (p. 111). Although not specifically stated by Blackburn, one could argue that he was warning college administrators not to set artificial goals that may cause problems with retaining students or to set meaningless goals that ultimately harm both the students and the institution. This stage is crucial for the community college professional because as Cohen and Brawer (2003) stated, community college professionals often see everyone as a potential student.

Once realistic goals have been established, the next phase of the plan can begin, which is the developing and stating of marketing strategies and tactics. This portion mirrors Michael's and Hogard's (1996) developing a marketing mix of specific programs for specific market segments and conducting promotional activities tailored to target them. In Blackburn's (1998) plan, market tactics and activities should be stated in significant, measurable details including the

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assignment of responsibility and resources (p. 112). This effort becomes most important to the

next phase of the plan, the implementation.

The final portion of the cyclical process is the assessment of the implemented plan.

Blackburn (1998) warned that the plan's assessment should not be in cumulative numbers:

> The final portion should not be completely summative. Much formative or along-the-way assessment can and should be built into the plan and its implementation. Specific assessment can and should be built into the plan and its implementation. Specific assessment can take place when goals and tactics are stated in measurable terms. Without goals that can be measured and activities with specified details, it is essentially impossible to tell if success has been achieved and if the plan has succeeded or failed. (p. 113)

In order to examine how Alabama community college marketers and recruiters promote

their institutions, I used Blackburn's (1998) suggested components for a marking plan to analyze

the data collected from this study. Although not specific to community colleges, the plan has

aspects that are beneficial to promoting the traditional mission of community colleges. The

current literature lacks specificity for community college marketing and recruiting, but by

organizing the study around the concepts outlined in a marketing plan, I intend to provide a basis

for community colleges to examine how they look at marketing and promoting their institutions.

Developing a Marketing Audit and Market Goal

Developing a marketing plan for higher education can be difficult for those who have

never attempted it before. Blackburn (1998) called the development of a marketing plan an

"unending process" (p. 108). The unending process is never finished because students must be

recruited, admitted, and enrolled each year. Blackburn suggested that the process is a cyclical

one that includes stages. The first of these is the creation of a market audit and goal

development. This stage includes assessment of where an institution is in terms of "market

descriptors" (Blackburn, 1998, p. 108). Market descriptors are how administrators can define

certain demographics found in their internal marketing audit, such as traditional students, adult

education students, or non-degreed students.

For some, terms like market descriptors can be intimidating if they are not familiar with

marketing terms. Even today, some administrators are uneasy combining higher education with

marketing concepts given the relatively short time the two concepts have co-existed. There was

a time in higher education when the idea of marketing an institution was viewed as being not

only unnecessary, but distasteful (Kirp, 2003). Institutions of higher learning were not perceived

as businesses. During the latter part of the twentieth century, however, attitudes about marketing

higher education began to change. Blackburn (1998) wrote

> Over the last 20 years, the use of marketing plans in college admissions has increased
> rather substantially. In the early 1970s, writers noted that the use of planning objectives
> for college recruiting was rare. In fact, the earliest known reference to marketing in
> college admissions seems to have appeared in 1969. (p. 107)

A combination of influences resulted in this shift. According to Antcil (2008), there were

three major factors to account for this. Among these were a decrease in financial support from

state and federal government, competition from for-profit higher education institutions, and the

change in the perception that higher education was a social institution to that of an industrial one.

Before the loss of financial support from state and federal government, colleges and

universities could rely on tuition to offset expenses. As funding rapidly reduced and student

enrollment began to shrink, institutions were faced with the prospect of empty classrooms (Fiske,

2008). One option was an increase in higher education marketing. Marketing higher education

may have been considered questionable at one time, but now it is a matter of necessity. It plays

an important role in the higher education environment when done correctly (Pate, 1993). The

prospect of doing it correctly also has a heightened role at colleges and universities. As higher

education marketing became both more aggressive and sophisticated, college administrators

created new positions to develop marketing strategies for their institutions (Fiske, 2008). The expected outcome being that these professionals would develop strategies that would increase enrollment and provide the revenue that came with an increased number of enrolled students. Adhering to data discovered in the internal marketing audit, then, is essential in this process as enrollment affects the institutions financially.

Analyzing Market Opportunity

Blackburn (1998) explained that once the audit and development have occurred, an institution's goals for achieving increased enrollment can be appraised through an analysis of the market. The process involves an inventory of the institution's strengths and weaknesses, but also includes an assessment of its perceived and potential competitors (p. 109). For community colleges, competition can be found in four-year institutions as well as private, for-profit colleges.

A major factor affecting the enrollment of public colleges and universities comes from competition from private, for-profit institutions. The for-profit, or proprietary institutions, discovered that, like any for-profit business, they must market like one, and they applied business methods to their marketing efforts. Chief among these was finding a "niche market," and most often that niche was the adult learner seeking a means of convenient delivery and instruction such as online classes (Kirp, 2003). Adding to this was the shift in higher education to include more career education programs. This shift from student interest in the liberal arts to what some have called the "practical arts" has been identified by the for-profit schools, and they used this as the way to market to potential students (Kirp, 2003). This competition has impacted the enrollment of two-year and four-year colleges, but it has also inspired them in their marketing efforts. Public colleges and universities have learned from their for-profit

counterparts that it pays to advertise (Antcil, 2008). They also have learned that like any product

sold in a free market society, competition affects the product. According to Antcil (2008),

> it may not lead to a better product or a better experience, but it does lead to a better awareness and usually greater purchasing volume. For-profit institutions employ sophisticated marketing techniques, they are doggedly determined, and they have a financial commitment to making their model work. These attributes make competing with them difficult, but it provides valuable lessons for the way public colleges and universities market themselves. (p. 23)

For example, it is not enough for community colleges to advertise that they have lower

tuition than their for-profit counterparts; they must also market concepts of value. For-profit

institutions charge considerably more than public community colleges, but the proprietary

schools market their advertising messages to persuade potential students that they are better

because of the cost (Kirp, 2003).

These lessons also include engaging in new strategies for marketing the institution as

well as reevaluating current strategies. Although many for-profit institutions execute more

sophisticated means of promotion, public institutions need to be aware of marketing activities

that are outdated and ineffective. According to Black (2004), Associate Provost for Enrollment

Services, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the traditional implementation of

higher education marketing methods is counterproductive. He stated

> Common reactions to enrollment dips, often driven by panic, include strategies such as expanding recruiting into areas where an institution has had little or no visibility, and lacks the resources or foresight to create a sustainable presence; the very thing needed to expand into a new market. Or someone will suggest more visits to high schools, where it is the exception rather than the norm that a representative will have a meaningful interaction with a serious prospective student. Similarly, many campuses invest precious resources in courting high school counselors, despite the fact that study after study has shown that guidance counselors often have the least influence on the college decision-making process. (Chronicle of Higher Education, Retrieved October 25, 2008, from professional Development Collection database)

Knowing how potential students reach their enrollment decisions must be a significant part of the marketing planning process in higher education. Although there has been research conducted on what influences student choice at four-year institutions, there has been a smaller amount done at the community college level and, in particular, with nontraditional students (Broekemier, 2002). One study conducted by Absher and Crawford (1996) proposed that the first step in marketing to potential community college students starts with an understanding of the students' perspectives. The research revealed five principal market segments of influence. These five segments were identified as "practical minded, advice seekers, campus magnets, goodtimers, and warm friendlies" (p. 66). The practical minded segment—those students who were concerned with quality, academic reputation, faculty, and safety factors—accounted for 58% of those surveyed. The second largest group, the advice seekers, made up 17%. The remaining results reported included the campus magnets at 10%, goodtimers at 8%, and warm friendlies at 7%. The authors suggested that based on their findings, community college administrators should plan and market their institutions in terms of these five specific market segments, with an emphasis on the practical aspects found from attending a community college.

Also of importance is learning which information sources are preferred by potential students. This knowledge enhances efficiency in delivering marketing messages (Goff, Patino, & Jackson, 2004). Too often, increased competition causes some higher education administrators to emphasize using media sources and strategies not preferred by their intended target market (Absher & Crawford, 1996). This has been particularly true of the community college where the sources for information cannot always be commonly identified due to the diverse student population (Goff et al., 2004). What is effective for traditional-aged students may not have the same impact on non-traditional students. Even when discussing one particular

segment of the market, there are differences based on institutional type as well. In their study

identifying preferred information sources of traditional-aged students in community colleges and

universities, research by Goff et al. (2004) revealed that even being in the same age demographic

does not mean that the preferred information source was the same. Their findings revealed those

high school students planning to attend a university and those students planning to attend a

community college differed significantly in regards to their preferred information sources.

Just as traditional-aged students have influences for their enrollment decisions, so, too, do

nontraditional students. Although there is significant literature on adult students, Broekemier

(2002) argued that much of it is anecdotal rather than empirical (p. 32). He asserted that there is

more information on demographic characteristics of students rather than on their expressed

opinions and attitudes. Therefore, if higher education marketers could learn about these attitudes

and opinions, then they could develop marketing messages that speak directly to nontraditional

students on both the community college and university level and not rely on assumptions that all

adult learners, regardless of institutional type, are influenced by the same factors and, therefore,

do not warrant any specific targeted messaging. Broekemier's findings support the assumption

that adult learners enroll at different institutional types for different reasons although there were

some crossover similarities. His findings showed that both two-year and four-year students

identified obtaining a better job as their most frequently mentioned reason for enrolling in their

institution; however, there were significant differences in the frequencies of mention for several

other reasons for enrollment (p. 43).

The increased competition among higher education institutions for students and resources

has contributed to shift of identity as well. When faced with increased competition, business of

any kind, including higher education, must be responsive to the needs of their markets (Antcil,

2008, p. 24). This creates a greater awareness of identity as a means of maintaining a

competitive advantage (Parameswaran & Glowacka, 1995). Faced with this, colleges and

universities have had to reevaluate their identities and images. Are they social institutions or are

they an industry? Many argue that the shift to an industry has already occurred (Gumport, 2000).

If it is an industry, then like any industry that creates products and services, these products and

services can be marketed to consumers.

As higher education institutions continue with their transition to a consumer environment,

marketing their institutions takes on a greater importance. College recruiters and marketers

promote higher education in an age of consumer mentality (Conneely, Good, & Perryman,

2001). This term is applied when potential students see higher education as a product or service

that is purchased, a purchase that can be assigned a value. If the education a student receives can

be viewed as a product, then that product has to be marketed to consumers. One way to view

potential students is to view them as consumers. If they are consumers, then many have come to

expect a level of service proportionate to the level of tuition and fees paid to institutions of

higher learning (DeBard, 2004). According to Conneely, Good, and Perryman (2001), "parents

and students have become much savvier in their college selection procedure" (p. 52). Colleges

and universities today encounter a heightened sense of accountability for their staff, facilities and

services, and overall educational experience (Conneely et al., 2001). This awareness of

consumerism and accountability influences the marketing strategies recruiters and marketers

engage in to promote their institutions and increase enrollment.

Setting Market Objectives

In the business world, setting market objectives is searching for niche marketing or unmet

markets (Blackburn, 1998). According to Blackburn, not all unmet markets in higher education

should be fulfilled. He argued that filling unmet markets may help meet the institution's overall

enrollment needs, but they only should be selected appropriately (p. 111). For example, if the

goal of the institution is to have a 10% increase in enrollment for the semester, concentrated

marketing and recruiting can be placed on a specific demographic market or targeted program.

The increased enrollment can be accounted for by increased marketing to female students or for

a specific program.

For community college professionals, this perspective may pose threats to their marketing

plans.   The "come one come all" approach is ingrained in the image of the community college

(Myran & Ralph, 1981). If community college professionals try to market themselves as

offering programs for all students, rather than concentrate on the unmet markets that may have

the most positive outcome for their institutions, they also run the risk of alienating students they

successfully recruit, but ultimately fail by concentrating on enrollment numbers rather than the

benefits of the students. By not setting realistic market objectives, community college

professionals could solve a recruiting problem but create a retention problem for later.

Developing and Stating Market Strategies and Tactics

In order to better understand how community college administrators and marketers are

promoting their institutions and programs, it is beneficial to be familiar with certain basic

concepts of marketing and promotion. The application and study of marketing itself is a massive

field. To cover even a small portion of it is an overwhelming endeavor (Antcil, 2006). The

benefit of understanding the basic concepts of marketing, as well as some of its applications

within the context of higher education, is pertinent to this study. Therefore, this discussion will

be limited in scope but not limited in providing a basic, essential understanding of the primary

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concepts needed for comprehension and application of marketing and promotional concepts in the field of higher education.

Higher education marketers, like any other marketers, must have a clear understanding of what marketing is and all it includes. Meisner (2006) used the analogy of Alice's encounter with the Cheshire Cat to illustrate the danger of not having a clear understanding. He recounted that as Alice wanders through the forest and happens upon two roads going in different directions, she is unsure of which to take. The Cheshire Cat asks her where she is going, to which Alice replies, she does not know. The Cat then tells her, "Well, if you do not know where you are going, then either road will do." Meisner's point was that if a marketer does not have a plan, then it does not matter what marketing strategies are conducted, because they will not work.

Just as counterproductive to not knowing is not understanding the definition of marketing. Johnson (1990) argued that college professionals make the mistake of defining what marketing really is. He wrote that in too many circumstances, promotion, public relations, and advertising are seen as marketing. All are important, but only effective when they are the result of product, place, price, and research (p. 4). Antcil (2008) suggested that true marketing of higher education institutions cannot be mistaken for branding or advertising, though these are elements that can be found in an institution's overall comprehensive marketing plan, they should not be confused with marketing as a whole.

The term marketing is pervasive in American culture. Many people think they understand what it is, but this understanding is not based on any real definition. In 2005, the American Marketing Association updated its definition of marketing. The definition stated that "marketing is considered a specialist function managing certain decision-making areas to create exchanges that satisfy the customers' and the firm's goals alike. These decision-making areas are

defined as the four Ps—product, place, price and promotion" (Gronroos, 2006, p. 397).

Arguably, this definition was developed by a marketer. Although it does present a defined

statement of what marketing is, its abstractness also creates interpretation for those seeking a full

understanding of the concept. Zyman (2002) put it much simpler. He argued that marketing is

selling. He contended that most people "don't really get that marketing isn't about the ad; it's

about communicating the benefits and features of a product or service in a way that will make

customers feel that their life is easier or simpler because of it" (p. 5).

Advertising and marketing are not synonymous. Many believe that advertising

encompasses all forms of business communication except those that are not paid, but this is not

the case (Meisner, 2006). Everything an institution does (and does not do) can be communicated

and advertised (Zyman, 2002). Advertising is short- or long-term, non-personal communication

by an identified sponsor through diverse media (Zyman, 2002). Its objectives include to inform,

to persuade, and/or to remind (Sandhausen, 2000). Advertising is about using the paid media to

build or create brand awareness (Meisner, 2006). Advertising's paid media has few limitations,

and it can be used in a variety of ways. It can include branding, packaging, spokespeople,

sponsorships, publicity, customer service, even the way employees are treated (Zyman, 2002).

Additionally, as new forms of media and communication are created, the ways of advertising by

utilizing them can be created as well.

Advertising also can be viewed in a negative way. Advertising can be perceived as "an

imposition, an unwelcome intruder who needs to be resisted" (Ries & Ries, 2002, p. 239). This

viewpoint often is supported by the views of those in the field. Zyman (2002) stated that

advertising's goal "is to sell more stuff to more people more often for more money" (p. 4).

Helping to offset some of the more negative aspects of advertising can be the successful use of

public relations. Advertising is an important and effective part of marketing, but no matter how much paid media is purchased, advertising is not as good at influencing public opinion as good public relations (Meisner, 2006, p. 10).

Just as advertising can be mistaken for marketing, public relations can be mistaken for advertising. Although advertising can be a part of public relation endeavors, it is not the same thing. In their book, *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*, Reis and Reis (2002) devoted several chapters to comparing advertising and public relations. According to the authors, advertising is spatial, public relations is linear; advertising uses the "Big Bang," public relations uses the "Slow Buildup;" advertising is visual, public relations is verbal; advertising reaches everybody, public relations reaches somebody; advertising is self-directed, public relations is other-directed; advertising is expensive, public relations is inexpensive; advertising is uncreative, public relations is creative; and advertising is incredible, public relations is credible. These comparisons provide more opportunity for conceptual comparisons, but there are more tangible definitions available.

Public relations helps develop and sustain relationships with key parties by presenting the most favorable, but still completely truthful, information (Lordan, 2005). Anyone can benefit from using public relations effectively. Public relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, schools, colleges, and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders, other institutions, and with society at large (*About Us*, n.d.). Just like effective advertising, public relations can support marketing, but it cannot be called the same. It has a wider and more significant purpose than just

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the selling of products and services. Public relations can assist in developing the message an

institution uses in advertising, selling, and promotion, but public relations is rarely the direct

cause of a sales transaction (Meisner, 2006, p. 11).

Target Marketing

In the context of higher education, a sales transaction can be viewed as enrollment.

Achieving higher enrollment is dependent upon developing successful marketing and recruiting

strategies. Given the diversity of students and missions found at American community colleges,

the marketing strategy known as target marketing is an important one for administrators and

marketers to consider if they wish to expand their enrollment. Target marketing is a systematic

approach to segmenting large markets into smaller groups of customers (Sandhausen, 2000).

Each of these smaller groups reacts differently to the marketing tools and communication mix

used to communicate messages. Developing specific messages and ways to deliver that message

becomes the primary focus of targeting marketing.

Target marketing, or segmenting marketing, allows marketers to identify specific

consumers and their needs while placing the consumers in smaller subgroups. These subgroups

can be identified through consumer and buying similarities such as frequency of purchase,

loyalty to brand, and other measures of responsiveness (Cravens, 1997, p. 124). By identifying

these groups and catering to their needs, marketers intend to make themselves more competitive

(Sandhausen, 2000). Target marketing also benefits institutions that have limited resources to

develop their marketing messages and to find effective methods of delivering them. Institutions

employing target marketing create the most attractive combination of markets and products while

utilizing the most of their resources (Sandhausen, 2000). Identifying the targets must be based

on research and internal examination. Based on assessment and research, an institution can

decide which market segments to connect to and which to ignore (Robinette, Brand, & Lenz, 2001).

Essential to employing any target marketing strategies is determining the number of desired markets. Markets can be determined through a variety of methods but Cravens (1997) suggested four variables in determining the formation of target segments. These variables include characteristics of people; use situation; buyer's needs and preferences; and purchase behaviors (p. 133). Each of these variables can assist marketers in identifying the size and desire of the target to be formed. Sandhausen (2000) provided the following examples of extremes in the target marketing strategic process. First, at one extreme, marketers choose to consider all actual or prospective customers as comprising a single market and to design a single offering to satisfy needs in this single market. At the other extreme, the marketer considers each potential customer as unique, discrete in itself, and devises distinctive offerings to appeal to each (p. 276). Neither extreme is viable for many institutions, but understanding the varying degrees of the spectrum can help marketers in determining how much, or how little, they want to employ with a target marketing strategy. Three strategies marketers might want to consider in determining how segmented they wish to market their institutions are undifferentiated target marketing, differentiated target marketing, and concentrated target marketing.

Undifferentiated or mass marketing generally is employed in situations where (a) all prospective buyers have the same characteristics, (b) the product is usually new with no competition, and (c) resources are sufficient to undertake the mass production and marketing initiatives required to serve this mass market (Sandhausen, 2000, p.276). Mass marketing may not seem like target marketing at all, but it can be considered a form of target marketing. To have this consideration, one needs to view mass marketing as being one large target market

(Lewison & Hawes, 2007). For this strategy, the marketer would use the same communication

mix. Savings would be generated in promotional costs, but the institution could leave itself

vulnerable to competition. Marketers would run the risk of casting a wide net only to reap little

benefit. This method represents a compromise even though only a few ideally are served by this

"one-size-hopefully-kind-of-fits-all" strategy (Lewison & Hawes, 2007, p. 16). Competitors

who use more concentrated marketing strategies with a wider mix of communication methods

also might prove problematic to those who implement this strategy.

If a differentiated strategy was used, a marketer would not reap the same benefits and risk

the same threats as those used in the undifferentiated strategy. In this strategy, the marketer

would promote many products with different marketing mixes tailored to the wants and needs of

a diverse target market (Sandhausen, 2006, p. 276). The differentiated segment could produce

more products and more profitability since they are targeted to a wider segment. However,

differentiated marketing also increases costs because promotional efforts cannot be planned and

implemented on a mass level (Sandhausen, 2006). For example, if a company's products appeal

to a wide variety of targeted markets, but the research showed that each product and each

message is reacted to differently by the subgroups, it would not be economically feasible to

develop strategies for each product and each potential consumer. Differentiated targeting

requires distinct marketing programs for each individual targeted group (Lewison & Hawes,

2007).

With the concentrated strategy, marketers focus their efforts on reaching one market

segment. This strategy often appeals to institutions that offer highly specialized services and

lack the resources of their competitors who use undifferentiated or differentiated marketing

(Sandhausen, 2000). Also called niche marketing, this strategy could be characterized as the "all

the eggs in one basket" approach. Although there would be great benefits in marketing to a

single segment, such as cost and message development, there would be risks as well. An

institution's ties to a single segment might result in a loss of purchasing power and make it

susceptible to competitors' influence (Sandhausen, 2000, p. 276). Lewison and Hawes (2007)

suggested that concentrated marketing takes one of two forms, "exclusive concentrated

marketing or integrative concentrated marketing" (p. 16). They wrote

> With exclusive concentrated marketing, an institution focuses all their attention on a
> single segment of the consumer market in hopes of dominating that market through total
> market penetration. Integrated concentrated marketing is simply an extension of the
> exclusive strategy and involves expanding a single market segment to encompass other
> similar segments. (p. 17)

Regardless of which strategy is used and the final number of segmented markets

determined, marketers need to be aware that assessment and evaluation are valuable tools in the

target marketing process. Robinette et al. (2001) suggested that measureable objectives should

be determined to gauge the success within segments and refined as needed. Their five-step plan

for this includes

1. identifying relative attractiveness of each segment;

2. determining which segments to target and create strategies to leverage strengths
   and close value gaps identified in the assessment stage;

3. determining specific tactics to implement each strategy;

4. developing a communication plan; and

5. devising metrics and measurement methodology. (p. 208)

Relationship Marketing

Much like target marketing, relationship marketing can be a valuable approach when

developing a marketing strategy. It can be particularly helpful to those in higher education.

Helgensen (2008) suggested that relationship marketing is valuable not only in the recruiting of

students, but in the retention of them as well. Retaining students is not often thought of as a

marketing responsibility, but there is some merit in having the perspective that a student, once

enrolled, is a returning customer. Just as they were marketed to for enrollment at an institution,

returning students should then be viewed as returning customers, who, in order to be retained at

the institution, must receive some level of customer satisfaction. When this customer concludes

the exchange of service, in this case reaching graduation, the individual will become a seller of

the institution to others based on the successful relationship they have established. In this view,

the ideas generated from relationship marketing mean that students attach a customer value to

their education (Helgensen, 2008).

Relationship marketing, according to Morgan and Hunt (1994), refers to all marketing

activities toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges (p.

22). Gronroos (2004) stated that the purpose of relationship marketing is to identify and

establish, maintain, enhance, and in some cases terminate relationships with customers at a profit

so that the objectives of all parties involved are met by a mutual exchange of promises (p. 9).

For a definition within a higher education context, Al-Alak (2004) offered that relationship

marketing is

> a set of marketing activities or actions that attract, motivate, and enhance existing and
> potential students' relationships, as well as parents, relatives, friends, reference groups
> for the benefit of all sides concerned, emphasizing on retaining existing students until
> their graduation, and attracting further students. (p. 4)

From these definitions, the benefit of utilizing relationship marketing becomes clear. By

successfully marketing the brand to one customer, it may produce loyalty not only from that

individual, but from those who the person has a relationship with as well. But how do these

successful relationships develop? Robinette et al. (2001) suggested that institutions that wish to

start long-term relationships with their customers commit themselves to building a relationship

as they would with a friend or family member. They offered four components for guidance. The

first of which is mutual benefit. Without a sense of mutual benefit, a relationship between a

customer and marketing cannot grow and is fated to fail (p. 125). The second component is

commitment. After recognizing the mutual benefit, both parties dedicate themselves to making it

successful, knowing that as the relationship grows; there will be a higher level of responsibility

from all parties to enhance the commitment. The third component is authenticity. According to

the authors, "successful relationships require openness and sincerity on both sides" (p. 125).

Customers, they contended, are savvier than ever and if actions are not sincere, then the

relationship will suffer. Conversely, expressing appreciation will be noticed by the customer and

will help build the relationship. Finally, communication is the last component in building the

successful relationship. Both the customer and marketer

> must be able to express themselves and know they'll be heard and understood. This
> implies that the companies must be willing to listen to customers and act upon their input.
> Emotional value is often exchanged through communication—whether it's a face-to-face
> meeting, emails between a customer and a service rep, or a birthday card sent to the
> customer. Without a healthy flow of communication, a learning relationship is
> impossible and the relation will stagnate. (Robinette et al., 2001, p. 125)

Also important in establishing and maintaining successful relationships is recognizing the

wants and needs of the audience who is trying to be reached. Relationship marketing can help

with this because it allows customers to relate to who is marketing to them and what is being

marketed to them. Zyman (2002) argued that marketers should not try to just identify customers

but, instead, should identify with them. He suggested that marketers first understand "why

people do what they do" (p. 88). If the marketer can understand that current events, social and

political trends, movies, books, and headlines all have an effect on consumers, then they can

begin to recognize how consumers think the way they do (Zyman, 2002). This understanding,

coupled with the components of relationship marketing, can allow the marketer to foster a customer with loyalty to the product or service long after the cycle of use has ended.

New and Emerging Strategies

Just as important as developing the most effective and successful marketing strategies to use is determining the most effective method of communicating the messages. Within a short amount of time, marketers learned that websites were a vital communication tool for any organization. Just as websites were looked upon as something novel but necessary, there are new and emerging types of media that have begun to inundate society. For many traditional-aged prospective students, these new mediums are the primary way they receive communication. College marketers and recruiters must become familiar with these methods and learn to use them to their greatest effect if they wish to reach their intended audiences. Collectively given the term "Web 2.0 Recruiting" by some recruiting professionals, these strategies utilize specific communication tools to develop their institutional messages and to promote their offerings (Kallay, 2007). Such communication tools as electronic mail, text messaging, instant messaging, web logs, and social network sites have become marketing tools for many in their marketing and recruiting strategies. However, they must learn to use these methods in a way that is effective, but does not distance the potential students to whom they are targeting (Kallay, 2007).

The collective name for the outlets used in these emerging communication methods was first called New Media, and then evolved into the more current used term of Social Media. The term New Media is meant to express the emergence of digital or computerized communication. Laermer (2003) stated simply that New Media is "shorthand for the Internet" because it has come to represent how powerful the Internet has become in the media industry (p. 185). The Internet offers wider options and more immediacy over traditional media forms. While New

Media does owe much to it, it is almost too simple to compare it to the Internet. Flew (2003), in

his book, *New Media: An Introduction*, provided a more complex definition when he described it

as most technologies that are digital often having characteristics of being manipulated,

networked, dense, and impartial. One other word it is often described as is democratic. New

Media, because of its manipulability and impartiality, can be used easily by all people who have

access to it. Whether it takes the form of a web log (blog), an email, or through social

networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter, people have the ability to use these

tools to communicate through their own terms. They have the power and influence to shape

these new media technologies, as well as their social, cultural, political, and economic impacts

transforming everything from commerce to communities (Flew, 2003).

Another term often associated with the Internet aspects of New Media is "Web 2.0."

This collective term has become a buzzword for anything new, cutting edge, and emerging found

online (Funk, 2009). Web 2.0 began with the rise of the Internet browser (Weber, 2007). As the

browsers became easier and more popular to use, the ease of navigating the Internet provided

more ways for users to communicate and manipulate web features. Funk (2009) suggested that

there are four main themes to Web 2.0:

1. the power of Web 2.0 is in the owner of the hands of the individual user;

2. web content is distributed, sorted, combined, and displayed across the web in

   formats unanticipated by the content creators;

3. new technology now makes rich online experiences and complex software

   applications possible; and

4. integration is breaking down walls between PCs, phones and mobile devices,

   marketing channels, and a user's experience across different websites (p. xi).

Web 2.0 allows its users a higher level of control on the web and that allows them to influence other users. With Web 2.0, a company's profile, reputation, and perception can be determined by users (Funk, 2009). It reinstates the idea that these new aspects to media are more democratic than traditional media.

In order to join in the democratic process provided by New Media, marketers and recruiters should learn about the tools available to them to deliver their messages. One such tool is electronic mail or email. It is estimated that people send and receive an average of 40 email messages a day (Laermer, 2003). The use of email in delivering marketing messages is not that new. Much like the traditional method of direct mailings, mass emails allow marketers to reach potential customers with information about their products and services. Unlike traditional mail, though, email requires little to no costs, and there are no ancillary costs associated with printing and packaging. Email allows senders to deliver more details and better support; it also allows them to erase, revise, resend, replay, and rethink messages frequently (Laermer, 2003, p. 189). However, just as with anything, it must be used responsibly. Levine (2008) suggested that those who "take technology for granted are doomed to misuse it" (p. 102). He wrote that if a communicator sends too many emails, the communicator runs the risk of being categorized as a "spammer," a sender of "junk email." He suggested that instead of overusing email, an "email blast" be considered. This is a concentrated email sent to a large list of potential clients that is the most persuasive message a sender can write, one that is clear, compelling, and to the point (p. 102). Subject headings in the email should not sound too commercial, or senders run the risk of having messages sent to their potential customers' spam filter.

In addition to email, another possible tool to incorporate is the use of web logs, or blogs. According to Scoble and Israel (2006), blogs are personal websites displayed in reverse

chronological order so that viewers can easily see changes made and leave comments and

reviews for the author and others to view (p. 26). Blogs allow a person to share journals and

thoughts or to be an amateur reporter discussing any topic (Trippi, 2004). They are inexpensive

and effective ways to publicize (Levine, 2008). Scoble and Israel (2006) suggested six key

differences between blogging and other channels of communication. They term these the

"Blogger's Six Pillars." First, blogs are publishable. Anyone can publish a blog, and the

individual can do it anywhere and for very little expense. Next, blogs are findable, meaning that

through search engines, people can find blogs by subject, author, or both. The third pillar is that

blogs are social. The authors explained that through the blog community, or blogosphere, there

is one big conversation going occurring. Topics move from site to site, linking each other, and

are unrestricted by conventional borders. The next pillar is that blogs are viral, and information

"spreads faster through blogs than via a news service and no form of viral marketing matches the

speed and efficiency of a blog" (p. 28). Next, blogs are "syndicatable," meaning that blogs can

be subscribed to, and notices of updates can be sent to the subscribers reducing the time it takes

to check and see if the blog has been updated. Finally, the sixth pillar is that blogs are linkable.

Because blogs can be linked to any other blog, "every blogger has access to millions of other

bloggers" (p. 28).

The most important aspect of a blog is that it is conversational. Many aspects of New

Media employ the concept of using conversations to communicate, but blogs allow people to

converse with many people in multiple locations from any point where there is Internet access

(Scoble & Israel, 2006, p. 27). Trippi (2004), in his book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*,

wrote that the best blogs feature a "strong human voice" in the commentary reactions by the

readers (p. 144). This provides instant feedback to what the viewers are reading. When

developing a blog, Levine (2008) suggested that bloggers target messages and keep them short and to the point. Bloggers want to attract viewers to their blogs and take advantage of the six pillars outlined by Scoble and Israel (2006), so they need to devise ways to keep blog viewers interested and wanting to return to them.

A blog's success can be dependent on the aspect of being conversational, as a new medium which has redefined the term, conversation. Social networking sites offer marketers the ability to conduct conversations in which they are not talking to their potential markets, but talking with them (Weber, 2007). Social networking sites allow people (or companies) to create profiles and a virtual network of their friends or a place to make new contacts (Scott, 2007). Institutions can benefit by participating in social networking sites not just by joining the conversation but by being able to control their brand identity (Funk, 2009). Social networking sites allow links for profiles to other media options such as websites or blogs. There are a variety of social networking outlets to take use. Social networking sites can include brand names such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. However, they also include corporate sites or intranet sites where organizations have created places where people with common interests can gather to share thoughts, comments, and opinions (Weber, 2007). Some organizations encourage their employees to provide information on their social networking pages about their workplaces. This tactic, especially for nonprofit organizations, provides details of the organization in a way that shows support and helps spread the word (Scott, 2007). These are not the only strategies, though. In his book, *Marketing to the Social Web*, Weber (2007) outlined five opportunities for expanding markets provided by social networking. These include targeted brand building, lead generation, partnership building, research and development, and employee communication (p. 23).

As effective as using social networking can be, it is not without hazards if used improperly. Because users of social networking sites can be wary of overt marketing tactics, it is a good idea to know how to best use the device to achieve goals. Scott (2007) suggested that for marketers to get the optimal use from marketing on social network sites, they need to

1.   target a specific audience;

2.   provide valuable and interesting information that people want to know;

3.   be authentic and transparent;

4.   create a number of links;

5.   encourage people to contact the author;

6.   participate in online discussions and groups;

7.   make it easy to find contact information; and

8.   be experimental in how the sites are used, whether it is tweaking something that could work better, expanding something that is working, or abandoning something that is not working at all. (p. 235)

Marketers who use social networking in their strategy and plans should also have a realistic idea of what they expect from their results. Funk (2009) warned that social networking will not always result in an increase in sales. He wrote that a better way to sell items would be to maximize one's search-engine advertising, but the social media presence is increasingly important. More personal connections to more customers is a good thing, and the ones "friended" in the social media are likely the best evangelists—people who are by nature among the more active, well connected, and opinion-making people online.

Another media outlet, video sharing websites like YouTube, is under the wider social media umbrella. Whether by utilizing video sharing sites or incorporating video on their own

websites, marketers are learning the benefits of using audio and video in a variety of ways. Institutions can place their audio and video through postings to video-sharing sites with relative ease. The only real equipment needed is a digital video camera and an account with YouTube, the most popular video sharing site on the Web (Scott, 2007). Other ways to share an institution's video, as suggested by Scott (2007) include developing an online video channel; engaging in "vlogging" or video blogging; inviting one's customer communities to submit video; and stealth insertions, which are corporate-sponsored video posts designed to seem like consumer generated videos (pp. 224-225). Another suggestion is "vodcasting" or the use of video podcasts.

A podcast is audio or video content sent directly to someone's computer, iPod, or web-equipped cell phone for the purpose of giving people who desire it more information about a particular topic (Levine, 2008). The podcast is distributed by a paid or unpaid subscription and can be offered directly from a download at the originator's website or a secondary source (Weber, 2007). More and more companies have begun to utilize podcasting since they became available in 2001. Weber (2007) suggested that companies cannot afford to ignore the popularity of podcasts in their marketing plans if they want to be viewed as marketing leaders. Podcasting allows marketers to reinforce ties to customers and helps them shape the conversation about their products and services (Weber, 2007, p. 182). Podcasting will not be as successful for some who wish to use it. A great deal of its effectiveness relies on the types of messages one wants to communicate. Michael Levine (2008) suggested that podcasts be considered if messages meet six criteria. First, the message can be communicated best through audio; "that is, someone telling the listener about the project, rather than the consumer reading about it" (p. 111). Second, one has to have access to the software needed for podcasting, which is not difficult. Next, the

message is something that can be "narrowcasted" or sent directly to those who have an interest in the industry, product, or service. Additionally, one must have the ability to be a good performer; one must be able to "communicate through a microphone, not a stiff who'll sound as if a gun is being held to his head and someone is forcing him to read the copy" (p. 111). Next, the typical target consumer is technologically savvy and will have the needed equipment to receive the podcast as well as an interest in receiving the information. Lastly, one needs to have enough information to justify a regularly scheduled podcast.

The strategies developed by higher education marketing and recruiting professionals to create effective messages for the traditional-aged potential student market could benefit from the use of tactics found in New Media. This, of course, means higher education professionals must learn about each communication tool that comprises it. The level of understanding of these new and emerging communication tools cannot be best served by trial and error, but by actually devoting time and budget funds to gaining a perspective that allows them to use the tools effectively in a higher education setting. Although these communication tools may be a part of life for today's college student, their use in recruiting and marketing has not reached that level. It is beneficial to examine the current and traditional use of student marketing and recruiting to gain a better perspective for marketing applications within a higher education context.

Implementing the Plan

Antcil (2008) argued that "the business of marketing higher education does not need to be antithetical to good education practice" (p. 26). The author further argued that marketing higher education should be regarded as an integral part of an institution's mission. He wrote that true marketing is integrated into every facet of an institution and should not be mistaken for branding or advertising, though elements can be part of a comprehensive marketing plan (p. 27). Hesel

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(2004) asserted that the institutional marketing plan should be created in tandem with the overall institutional strategic plan to allow everyone at the institution the opportunity to communicate the same message and have a clear sense of the institution's goals and objectives from both a marketing and educational perspective. Strategic planning has much in common with the components found in Blackburn's (1998) marketing plan. However, even with similarities and the perceived need for collaboration in terms of strategic and marketing planning, higher education marketers are not viewed as being able to solve institutional problems found outside their own direct areas of responsibility (Peyronel, 2000). Yet, their duties and responsibilities keep growing.

Implementing strategic planning and the development of a marketing plan for the institution is an important role of communication administrators and higher education marketers. This is not the only role however. Communicators on higher education campuses increasingly are being given expanded duties in terms of marketing and admissions (Peyronel, 2000). In addition to strategic planning, competent higher education public relations officials should be knowledgeable in crisis management, issues management, research methods, and providing public relations support (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994). They may be called on to act as government relations representatives, sports information providers, publication managers, alumni affairs coordinators, and development directors (Gillis, 1997). If higher education marketers and communication administrators are given multiple duties that continue to increase, an argument could be made to expand their involvement with other aspects of institutional planning too. If senior marketers are omitted from institutional decision making, then these individuals will not be able to assume these diverse institutional roles and conduct them effectively (Peyronel, 2000). Having marketers involved with others at an institution also limits the chance of failure in

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implementing marketing strategies. According to Blackburn (1998), it is essential that all

segments of a college are involved in enrollment marketing because any segment can derail the

marketing plan and process (p. 115).

Although some applications of higher education marketing are universal, others are

unique only to the community college. Although there is competition for students among all

institutional types, the historic mission of the community college as being all things to all people

increases the level of their competition. If community colleges seek to promote the strategy of

being all things to all people, then marketers and recruiters view everyone as a potential student.

Community colleges may intend to implement market strategies to the target demographics they

serve, but their strategies depict a "come one, come all" image (Myran & Ralph, 1981). This

strategy presents several problems for those implementing the marketing plan and its messages.

If the marketing and recruiting professionals cannot address this successfully while they

implement their plan, students could be negatively affected by discovering these limitations after

enrolling.

<div align="center">**Assessment of the Plan**</div>

As mentioned earlier, the final stage of Blackburn's (1998) marketing plan may be the

most important because this is the stage which will begin the next cycle of the "unending

process." Blackburn warned that even though this stage is the last one, assessment should not be

a final destination only viewed when the plan has completed its first cycle. He wrote, "The final

portion of each revolution of the marketing cycle should not be completely summative, but

along-the-way, assessments can be built into the plan and its implementation" (p. 113). Final

assessments should be reserved for the plan's measurable goals and objectives. For Blackburn,

this effort is the most important part of the assessment. He explained that,

Without goals that can be measured and activities with specified details, it is essentially impossible to tell if success has been achieved with the plan. Moreover, it is manifestly impossible to determine where or when a plan or its execution failed. (p.113)

Conclusion

Because of the diversity of student types and programs found in American community colleges, developing targeted messages becomes increasingly important. Strategic marketing has long been viewed as an important way for businesses to reach specific audiences. Having a plan to do this is just as important. As higher education has made the shift from a service model to a business model, college administrators have learned that developing specific messages to specific groups could help alleviate some of the competition felt by the growing higher education options open to students. The development of marketing strategies where relationships are cultivated and used to elicit action are a logical avenue for higher education professionals. Because of the number of targets who could be seen as potential community colleges students, it is imperative that a clear understanding of developing a marketing plan is needed and as enrollment goals are explored.

Just as imperative is the development of an effective message and the selection of the medium to deliver that message. As mentioned, assuming the same message delivered through the same medium but to different intended audiences is not realistic in today's higher education environment. Developing messages that spur action for adult and non-traditional students is just as important as delivering messages for traditional-aged students. Conducting research to see how potential students wish to receive communication should be an important part of any higher education marketing plan. If the research shows that an intended audience prefers any of the media outlets that comprise the new and emerging media which exists, then care should be given

that it is used in a way that is most effective. These strategies should not be engaged in just for the sake of engaging in them.

Within the context of higher education, marketing and recruiting have evolved from being viewed as a distasteful enterprise to one that must be conducted. The success of higher education marketing creates mutual benefits for both the institution and the student. As an institution's enrollment grows, new sources of revenue are generated. For students, they are able to receive a clear understanding of the options open to them for academic achievement and career preparedness. Higher education administrations must develop their marketing plans with this in mind if they are to allow their institutions to grow. More importantly, they will present potential students with the needed information in the format they need to make a decision involving their academic needs and allow them to be viewed as individuals rather than as a wide pool of applicants.

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study was to learn how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. The traditional mission of the American community college has always been one of access and affordability in which everyone is a potential student, and anyone can benefit from enrolling (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

The Alabama Community College System offers its diverse student population a variety of programs with a mixture of career technical and academic transfer offerings. Currently, the system is comprised of 21 community colleges, four technical colleges, a military institute, an upper division institute, and two workforce development institutions. Its mission is to "provide a unified system of institutions dedicated to excellence in delivering academic education, adult education, and workforce development" (*About ACCS*, n.d.).

From 2009 to 2011, colleges within the system have experienced record enrollment. The rise in enrollment cannot be directly linked to recruiting and marketing strategies. Instead, it has been attributed to the leading factor influencing the record enrollment of community colleges across the country, the current economic climate (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009).

To investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions, I conducted case studies at three Alabama community colleges. Data collected as part of this study included individual interviews, focus groups, and documents. These documents included college schedules, brochures, viewbooks, websites, and

social media outlets such as the college's official Facebook page and Twitter feeds. The rationale for selecting these marketing and recruiting tools was because they represent both traditional and new forms of communication and can assist in identifying answers to the study's research questions. The three community colleges were selected for unique factors including geographic location, campus size, enrollment, and variety of available academic programs. The participants were selected based on the roles they play in the marketing and recruiting process at their institutions.

Students were asked to volunteer to participate in the focus group. Announcements were circulated on the students' campuses asking for volunteers. Students were not given specific information or directions prior to the focus group. For colleges that had multiple campuses, an effort was made to include students from each campus. The students who participated in the focus group were representative of current community college students. Both non-traditional and traditional students participated. Transfer students and career education students were also represented in the study.

The Problem

Because of the traditional mission of the American community college and the types of students they serve, everyone is a potential community college student (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The limitless student recruits combined with budgetary constraints, administrative directives, and cultural influences creates difficulties for recruiting and marketing professionals at Alabama community colleges. The uniqueness of the individual, the commonality of marketers and recruiters, as well as how each influences their communication strategies, are issues that need to be investigated. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions.

Using data collected from personal interviews, focus groups, and document analyses of marketing materials from three Alabama community colleges, this study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do college employees collaborate across organizational departments to develop marketing and recruiting messages;

2. How do community colleges utilize formal marketing and recruiting plans to reach potential students; and

3. What are the marketing and recruiting messages being sent by the institutions?

Population

Although the Alabama Community College System is comprised of 21 community colleges, four technical colleges, one military institute, and a workforce development agency, the focus of this research is on the 21 Alabama community colleges. While benefit could be gained from examining all the academic institutions within the system, the missions of the community colleges are more similar and more easily comparable than some of the other institutions of the system. This shared mission is less specific than that of the technical colleges and military institution. The broader mission of the community colleges align more with the community college's traditional role of offering more to a wider variety of individuals, which is a primary focus of this research.

In order to learn more about the marketing and recruiting methods conducted at the 21 community colleges found in the system, three institutional case studies were conducted. First, I interviewed three individual employees from each campus, for a total of nine individual interviews. These individuals were selected on the basis of their roles within the respective institution's marketing and recruiting process, both internally and externally. Two of the three

colleges selected have seen their enrollments decrease since the record enrollment reported by the state two years ago. The remaining college has seen enrollment remain steady, but has had no sizable increases. Each college serves special populations, traditional and nontraditional students, multiple communities, and has a diversity of academic and career technical programs. Each of these factors makes it favorable to conduct target marketing at the institution.

One of the set of interviews was conducted with the individuals identified as the Public Information Officers of their institutions. As previously mentioned in Chapter I, there is no consistent job description or title for the individuals charged with conducting the marketing at each institution within the Alabama's Community College System. However, the Department of Postsecondary Education, the organizational body of Alabama's two-year college system, does identify one Public Information Officer at each institution. Determining these individuals was not difficult as they are published by the Department of Postsecondary Education as well as the system's professional development association, ACCSPRA.

<div align="center">**Sample**</div>

The public information officer at each of the three community colleges selected was interviewed along with two additional individuals. These remaining individuals' titles and functions were constant at each location. They were purposively selected. Among the additional interview participants included presidents of the institutions, recruiters and students, both traditional and non-traditional. The advantage of interviewing these individuals allowed for different viewpoints, which led to a better synthesis for interpreting the data. It also assisted in determining how much involvement these additional individuals have had in the creation of a formal marketing plan. As Blackburn (1998) wrote, with higher education marketing plan implementation, greater involvement in the plan from others at a college can lead to greater

investment in the plan, and ultimately greater success (p. 113). The anonymity of each participant will be maintained and was assigned an alias, as was the colleges selected. The research conformed to the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Alabama.

This selection process of interviewees is not uncommon in qualitative research. Non-probability, or purposeful sampling, is the method of choice in most qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Wolcott (1998) suggested that the researcher use instinct in the purposeful selection of those to be interviewed. He wrote:

> Let intuition and your own neutral way of going about things guide you. Recognize, however that you may have no other choice than to talk to self-appointed informants who present themselves not only as willing to talk but probably insistent that they are the very people you most need to meet. (p. 212)

The three colleges selected to conduct the case study were chosen based on a variety of factors through purposeful sampling as well (see Tables 2–6). These factors included geography, campus size, enrollment, and variety of programs.

Western State Community College

The first college selected was Western State Community College. Western State was selected because it is a multi-campus college with more than four locations and is geographically located in the northwest central portion of the state. Western State saw an increase in enrollment during the recent economic downturn, but since then has seen those levels return to what they were before the recession.

The three individuals selected for one-on-one interviews at Western State Community College offer diverse perspectives for the study. They included Annie, director of public relations; Dr. Pheiffer, president of Western State; and Julie, a recruiter.

The Public Information Officer for Western State Community College is Annie, the director of public relations. As public relations director, Annie oversees the marketing and public relations for the multi-campus college. Dr. Pheiffer is the president of the college and the direct supervisor of Annie. Julie is the campus-wide recruiter for Western State Community College. She is a member of the student services department and her direct supervisor is the college-wide Dean of Students.

Eastern State Community College

Eastern State Community College is located in the east central part of Alabama. It is a multi-campus college, and it is a feeder school to a large state university. Eastern State's enrollment has remained steady in the last two years. Individuals interviewed at this institution were Public Information Officer Michelle; President Dr. Newmeyer; and Janet, a college recruiter.

Michelle worked as a recruiter before joining the college's public relations department. Her work is supervised by Dr. Pheiffer. Before becoming president of the college, Pheiffer served in various other roles at community colleges. The college has three recruiters. One of the recruiters, Janet was interviewed

Southern State Community College

Southern State Community College has multiple locations, is located in the southern area of the state, and was chosen because of its designation as a historically black college. Among

those selected for interviews at the college include Lee, the college's public information officer; Dr. Hathaway, president of the College; and Adrian, the college's recruiter.

As Director of Public Relations, Lee has been with the college for several years. His duties span marketing and public relations management which includes developing strategies, writing and producing all college communications, media placement, and publication coordination. Lee is the only person in his department dealing directly with public relations and marketing. The recruiter, Adrian, is supervised by the dean of students at Southern State. Dr. Hathaway is the president of Southern State. He has held various roles within the Alabama Community College System including faculty and administration positions.

In addition to the community college employees interviewed in this study, students were also interviewed. Three students from each campus were interviewed for a total of nine students. The student interviews will be conducted in a focus group format. According to Topor;

> Focus groups are a means of obtaining information on a very personal basis. In-depth information, through modified discussion, in a small group atmosphere where all the elements of verbal and visual communications are possible, makes up a typical focus group. (p. 5)

An explanation of who will comprise the sample and what factors assisted in their selection is illustrated in Tables 2 through 4.

Table 2

Selection Factors for Western State Community College

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Factor	Description
Geography	Northwest Central
Campus size	Four campuses
Fall 2010 enrollment	4,660 students
Variety of programs	34 programs of study
	Documentation reviewed Website; publications; social media sites; marketing plan; recruiting plan
	Interviewees Annie, Director of Public Relations; Dr. Pheiffer, President; Julie, Recruiter; Western State student focus group

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Table 3

Selection Factors for Eastern State Community College

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Factor	Description
Geography	East Central
Campus size	Three campuses
Fall 2010 enrollment	4,869 students
Variety of programs	26 programs of study
	Documentation reviewed Website; publications; social media sites; marketing plan; recruitment plan
	Interviewees Michelle, Public Information Officer; Dr. Newmeyer, President; Janet, Recruiter/Advisor; Eastern State student focus group

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Table 4

Selection Factors for Southern State Community College

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Factor	Description
Geography	Southwest
Campus size	Two campuses
Fall 2010 enrollment	3,600 students
Variety of programs	46 programs of study
	Documentation reviewed
	Website; publications; social media sites; marketing plan; recruitment plan
	Interviewees
	Lee, Public Information Officer; Dr. Hathaway, President; Adrian, recruiter; Southern State student focus group

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Methods

The qualitative methods of this research project benefitted from the researcher's familiarity of how community college employees traditionally market and recruit. On another level, the research also allowed for an outsider's perspective and learning of how other professionals conduct marketing initiatives at other institutions. Because each community college within the system conducts its recruiting and marketing differently; does not involve the same organizational roles and structure; and does not utilize the same methods and strategies, there is the potential for several different viewpoints to emerge. Qualitative research provided the best strategy to understand the motivations and practices of marketing and recruiting professionals in the Alabama Community College System.

To provide a better understanding of how a qualitative methodology was chosen for this study, it is of benefit to discuss the three reasons for selecting qualitative research as an approach outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) in their work, *Basics of Qualitative Research*. As the authors noted, there are many reasons for deciding to use a qualitative research approach. Among these reasons included preference of the researcher, nature of the research problem, and to "obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (p. 11). In examining each of these three reasons, there was support in adopting a qualitative research method for this study.

A preference for qualitative research played a large role in the determination that it is the best research method to use in this study. The research conducted in the researcher's postgraduate work has been primarily qualitative in nature. Moreover, the majority of the research classes taken by the researcher were qualitative in nature, and they prepared him for conducting this study through the examination of the basic and more advanced areas needed in conducting qualitative research. The process and components of qualitative research have also influenced the researcher's preference for this research methodology. Among these components are data collection; interpreting and organizing data (coding); and finally, producing a report of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Each component is important and each can benefit from having experience in conducting them.

The nature of the research problem was also one reason to support the decision to employ qualitative research methods. For qualitative research to be successfully employed, the research problem must lend itself to being answered as a "how" or "what" question (Cresswell, 1998). This is true for the research problems identified in this study—that marketers and recruiters of

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Alabama community colleges risk alienating potential students because they develop and utilize broad messages, do not use a formalized marketing plan, and rely on traditional methods of communication—lend themselves to better investigation through qualitative means. It is not necessarily what the marketers and recruiters are doing, but it is how they are doing it. Each institution has a way in which marketing and recruiting is conducted, but the examination lies in how they are doing it and if they are doing it effectively. A quantitative survey may have provided the researcher basic insight into what an institution was doing in terms of marketing and recruiting, but qualitative research also provides greater details as to the motivations for their strategies. As mentioned earlier, the primary purpose of this study is to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. Although the use of a survey or other more formal uses of quantitative research methods might prove beneficial in answering these questions, the sharing of feelings, thought processes, and emotions would be of greater benefit for this study. Surveys would limit a responder's answers to static questions developed by the researcher. Qualitative interviews allow responses that examine the feelings of the interviewees and make the research questions more personal (Merriam, 1998). As Tewksbury (2009) explained,

> Qualitative methods provide a depth of understanding of issues that is not possible through the use of quantitative, statistically-based investigations. Qualitative methods are the approach that centralizes and places primary value on complete understandings, and how people understand, experience and operate within milieus that are dynamic, and social in their foundation and structure. (p. 39)

This depth of understanding of the marketers and recruiters of the Alabama Community College System is essential in addressing the research problems outlined in this study.

Research Design

By choosing to conduct interviews, the researcher was able to garner the information needed to address the research problems more effectively in a descriptive and exploratory manner in order to provide a better understanding of current marketing and recruiting issues for community colleges. Interviewing is one of the most common forms of information gathering found in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). However, the commonality of the strategy does not make it any less time consuming. It requires arranging and conducting the initial interview and any additional ones, plus the added effort of transcription and analysis (Wolcott, 1999). Interviewing allows researchers to learn information though the perspectives of those interviewed. Sometimes, these perspectives are dependent on the personal interpretation of respondents. Interviews are necessary when behavior or actions cannot be witnessed firsthand, and, therefore, these interpretations of events are necessary (Merriam, 1998). With the interviews, the researcher expects to discover stories. The stories that will be discovered will encompass the perspectives of those interviewed as related through the metaphors, symbols, and concepts associated with qualitative research. The story or "experiential narrative" developed from the interviews may be used as a way to develop a richer and deeper understanding of a phenomenon and as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66).

Interviews allowed the research to be more collaborative. Because the researcher was interviewing colleagues in the Alabama Community College System, a collaborative element is important to the research process. It is the researcher's intention, with the interviews and with the study as a whole, not to lay blame on the marketing and recruiting professionals of the system or to point out their shortcomings, but, rather, to understand their own experiences and

apply them to the research problem. This collaborative effort does pose some difficulties.

Questioning always involves a certain risk and can emphasize "an extractive element" when

researchers had intended a more mutually beneficial method (Wolcott, 1999, p. 52). If perceived

as merely mining information, a researcher could jeopardize future research opportunities or

additional opportunities for learning. Yet, the research cannot seem too removed, or the

researcher runs the risk of seeming to be disinterested (Wolcott, 1999). A balance was reached

in conducting the interview process.

In his book, *Ethnography, A Way of Seeing*, Wolcott (1999) proposed a typology for

distinguishing among the major forms of interviewing. These include casual conversation, life

history, key informant interviewing, semi-structured interview, survey, household census,

questionnaire, projective techniques, and other measurement techniques (Wolcott, 1999). For

the purposes of this study's interviews, the primary typology was semi-structured interviews.

According to Wolcott, semi-structured interviews "have an open-ended quality about them" and

evolve as they are conducted (p. 55). Semi-structured interviews either have all the questions

worded differently or the interviews are a combination of more or less structured questions

(Merriam, 1998). All interviewees are not asked the same questions, or they are not asked them

in the same way. This interview approach is not as rigid as structured interviews. Structured

interviews are only used in qualitative research to gather common socio-demographic data from

respondents such as marital status, income level, and history of employment (Merriam, 1998).

Conversely, wholly unstructured interviews are rarely used in qualitative research. Unstructured

interviews typically are used when the researcher does not know enough about a problem to

begin asking questions about it (Merriam, 1998).

The interviews conducted with the college employees were one-on-one interviews. This method allowed for more personal and candid responses. In order to fully investigate the problem of study, candid answers are required. As Creswell (1998) stated,

> For one-on-one interviewing, the researcher needs individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas and needs to determine a setting in which this is possible. The less articulate, shy interviewee may present the researcher with a challenge and less than adequate data. (p. 124)

The interviews were conducted in person and audiotaped. In-person interviews conducted with a recording device will create a more conversational tone to the interviews. Taped conversations with respondents telling their story allow for a more reflective experience (Van Manen, 1990). Recorded interviews also ensure that everything said during the interviews is preserved for later analysis (Merriam, 1998). Notes of the interview can be taken as well. Many qualitative researchers employ both strategies (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). However, the writing of notes should not become distracting during the interview process.

In addition to the semi-structured typology, another of Wolcott's (1999) typologies played a role in the research process. Key informant interviewing refers to the practice of making one or more informants a major source of information in one's research (p. 52). As interviews were conducted by the researcher, there were one or more interviewees who emerge as a key informant. Wolcott warned that some researchers often rely heavily on key informants, sometimes to the exclusion of other sources; therefore, it is better, when possible, to have an idea of whether or not a researcher intends to use certain informants more or less (p. 52).

Interviews conducted with the students were in the form of focus groups. Focus groups have historically been used in both marketing research and qualitative studies. The goal of focus group research is to collect data from the opinions of several group members to assist the research in learning more about their study (Kruger & Casey, 2009). According to Topor (1992),

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focus groups are less expensive, more flexible, provide greater environmental control, and

provide greater discussion for the researcher and subject.

In addition to the interviews conducted with the employees and students of the

community colleges, additional forms of analyses were utilized. The main technique used was

content analysis. Merriam (1998) asserted that all qualitative data analysis is content analysis in

that it is the content of interviews, field notes, and documents that is analyzed (p. 160). The

examination of communication in this study is supported significantly through the use of content

analysis. Content analysis has long been used in communication studies. As early as the 1950's,

Berleson (2000) wrote about the importance of content analysis in communication studies.

Berleson described its importance:

> In the communication process a central position is occupied by the content. By
> communication content is meant that body of meanings through symbols (verbal,
> pictorial, gestural) which makes up the communication itself. In the classic sentence
> identifying the process of communication—'who says what to whom, how, and with
> what effect'—communication content is the what. Since the content represents the
> means through which one person or group communicates with another, it is important for
> communication research that it be described with accuracy and insight. (p. 200)

Berelson (1952) went on to offer several characteristics of content analysis. While

content analysis historically has been used in quantitative research, it has been adapted for use in

qualitative methods. For adaptation for the use of qualitative methods, communication of

meaning becomes the focus, and the number of times a message is communicated is examined

(Merriam, 1998). Through the use of content analysis, the researcher examined an institution's

social media, website, catalog, class schedule, advertisements, and recruiting materials to

determine how this secondary data source could be used to enhance the data collected from the

interviews. The researcher also examined how these components are developed for the

marketing plan, and when applicable, the marketing plan itself. Using Berlelson's analogy, the

researcher examined the "what," but by adapting content analysis for qualitative methods, I also examined the "who, whom, and how" as well as the "why." The materials analyzed helped enhance what was reported by those interviewed and it provided visual representations of the messages and the methods in which they were delivered. The content analysis alone would not have told the entire story, but it improved the interpretation of the data collected when placed in the context of what was reported.

Comparing the data discovered in the interviews and content analysis allowed for the identification of variations in the patterns of the data collected (Straus & Corbin, 1998). This analysis, constant comparative, differs from theoretical comparisons. It focuses on a process where the researcher compares incidents with others which lead to tentative categories which are then further compared until a theory is created (Merriam, 1998). Constant comparative analysis can also assist in the formulation of descriptive categories. According to Yin (2009), obtaining different points of view with different descriptive purposes can lead to a better understanding of how things should be categorized. This is important in developing case studies, which will also be used in this research.

Case studies have at least four different applications—to explain, to describe, to illustrate, and to enlighten (Yin, 2009). Merriam (1998) defined a case study as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 27). According to Yin (2009), a technical definition for a case study can be divided into two separate parts. The first part deals with the scope of the study. He wrote:

> A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context and not clearly evident. In other words, you would use the case study method because you wanted to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompassed important contextual conditions—because they were highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study. (p. 18)

The second part of the definition deals with the data collection and data analysis strategies. In this part, the case study inquiry

> Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest that data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 18)

Additional characteristics of case studies include that they are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). Many sources suggest that case studies, in order to be used successfully, must be bounded systems, something that is bounded by time, space, or event (Creswell, 1998, p. 62). Within the context of this study, the colleges are bounded together by the phenomenon of marketing and recruiting in Alabama community colleges. It is a bounded system, as Merriam suggested, because it is an instance of concern or issue (p. 28).

Apprehension for using case studies exists in addition to the benefits of using them. Yin (2009) wrote that there is outright "disdain" for the process among researchers (p. 14). He suggested that this disapproval comes from the case study researcher's lack of thoroughness in conducting the research. He wrote, "too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions" (p. 14). Merriam (1998) also suggested some limitations including devoting enough time to the method, sensitivity of the researcher, and issues of generalization. Creswell (1998) offered that there are some inherent challenges found in case studies, among them identifying if the case can be placed in the bounded system; deciding on a single case or multiple cases; developing a rationale for the purposeful sampling; having enough information for an in-depth idea of the study's limits and

values; and deciding what the actual boundaries of the case are and how it can be constrained to the limits of time, place, and events.

As noted by Creswell (1998), utilizing single or multiple case studies can be a limitation to using the method. In this study, the use of multiple cases will be utilized and will allow for great constant comparison. The inclusion of multiple cases is a common strategy for enhancing the external generalization of a researcher's findings (Merriam, 1998). Case studies can cover multiple cases and then draw a single set of intersecting conclusions (Yin, 2008). In establishing a need for a multiple-case study, Yin (2008) suggested some preliminary ideas. He suggested researchers look at one case and ask themselves, what can they learn from a companion case and how might it augment the single case findings? Also, could additional cases make the findings even more compelling? Merriam suggested they could when she wrote, "the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variations across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be" (p. 40).

Data management in all forms of qualitative research is an important part of the process. After the completion of the interviews, specific attention was given to the coding process in order to reach success. According to Merriam (1998), coding occurs at two levels—identifying information about the data and interpretive constructs related to analysis (p. 164). Coding can be simple or complex, occur on multiple or single levels, and be illustrated in different ways (Merriam, 1998).

The coding process for this study incorporated both open coding and axial coding. According to Creswell (1998), in open coding, the researcher derives initial categories about the topic being studied by segmenting information, looking at each category and finding several subcategories and extreme possibilities (p. 57). The initial coding and development of categories

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will derive from the purpose of the study and the responses of the interviewees. This process

will lead to a diffusion of the data. During open coding, data collection is open to all

possibilities (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To ensure that the open coding process is most

beneficial, the process of data management began immediately after the interviews were

conducted.

Also of value was the process of axial coding. With axial coding, the researcher

reassembles the data in new and different ways after open coding (Creswell, 1998). Through

axial coding, examination of data can be represented in a color coded diagram allowing for

greater assistance in the examination process. The process of open coding and axial coding lead

to the creation of the final relevant coded categories for the study.

<center>**Trustworthiness**</center>

With any type of research, trustworthiness and validity are important parts of the research

process. Research conducted in education should be performed in a manner that results in

reliable data because researchers involve themselves in people's lives (Merriam, 1998). The

research to be conducted in this study not only deals with the lives of the students of the

community colleges but with the professionals charged with recruiting them. I intend the

findings of this research to benefit both students and community college employees within the

system as a whole, not just the colleges selected for the study. Because of this, the research was

designed to enhance the validity of the findings.

Triangulation was the main strategy used to enhance internal validity. According to

Merriam (1998), triangulation utilizes multiple sources or methods to confirm emerging findings

(p. 204). The use of the multiple persons to be interviewed will help create a "holistic

understanding of the phenomena being studied" (Merriam, p. 204). Conducting interviews

combined with document analysis also provides greater validity for data collection. Yin (2009) wrote, "the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration," which should allow for more accurate information (p. 115).

As someone who has been both a marketer and recruiter in the Alabama Community College System, I have firsthand experience with the issues outlined in this study. For some of the college employees interviewed in this study, there was a previous professional relationship established with them. It is acknowledged that this experience and these relationships could influence bias in terms of interpreting the data collected from the study. While it is not possible to be completely free from bias, every effort was made to remain objective in the interpretation of the data collected.

Summary

In this chapter, the rational for utilizing a qualitative research methodology was outlined. The decision to choose qualitative methods was supported by factors outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Ultimately, the choice was made because it was the method that would help address the identified problems of the study. Through personal interviews with individuals having diverse roles at Alabama's community colleges, the researcher discovered if the traditional strategies employed by marketers and recruiters are effective. If the strategies have negatively impacted the enrollment of potential students through ineffective messages and delivery, and by not utilizing a formal marketing plan to meet their enrollment goals. Assisting in this discovery were the supplemental methods of content analysis. Analysis was made utilizing constant comparatives, and the method of triangulation enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. It is the researcher's intent that the qualitative methods outlined in this chapter will

assist not only in examining the research problem but will add to the current literature on the

topic.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals within Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. Of primary interest in the study was the examination of how individuals responsible for marketing and recruiting develop their marketing and recruiting messages and strategies. Marketing and recruiting is not contained and limited to specific employees. There are certain employees who have a more active role in the recruiting and marketing of their institutions. These individuals are also tasked with the development of strategies and actions to promote their colleges. However, all community college employees can be looked at in some way as recruiters for their institutions. For the purposes of this study, the individuals primarily responsible for promoting their colleges included the president, the public information officer, and the recruiter.

Because the role of the American community college traditionally promotes open access and affordability for a diverse potential student base, the examination of effective marketing and recruiting methods is important to the colleges as well as potential students. Students benefit from effective marketing and recruiting methods when they are provided beneficial information to assist them with the completion of their academic goals. Community colleges benefit from effective marketing and recruiting methods when successful practices lead to increased enrollment.

In this dissertation, I focused on the experiences of key community college administrators responsible for the development and practice of marketing and recruiting for their institutions,

and currently enrolled students at their colleges. The study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do college employees collaborate across organizational departments to develop marketing and recruiting messages;

2. How do community colleges utilize formal marketing and recruiting plans to reach potential students; and

3. What are the marketing and recruiting messages being sent by the institution?

The qualitative interview questions were posed to the president, public information officer, recruiter, and currently enrolled students. Additionally, document analysis and viewing of social media outlets was conducted to examine the development and practice of marketing and recruiting at the community colleges involved in the study.

Major Themes of the Study

I organized the data collected into four major themes that emerged from the research:

1. The planning and formulation of a cohesive and collaborative marketing and recruiting message is important to the college employees responsible for producing them, but it was not reflected in the practices of the institution;

2. Formal marketing and recruiting plans were not utilized in the overall planning of the colleges' marketing and recruiting strategies;

3. The college employees were focused on traditional recruiting and marketing messages and practices rather than any innovative and emerging methods; and

4. College employees need to involve currently enrolled students in the planning and development of marketing and recruiting messages and strategies including the involvement of nontraditional students.

College marketers and recruiters are responsible for the promotion of their institutions, yet for all the colleges involved in the study, the marketing and recruiting divisions operate as two separate divisions with little collaboration between the two. This lack of collaboration resulted in problems formulating cohesive promotional messages for the colleges. The structure often produced a hindrance rather than a help in effectively recruiting students.

The lack of formal marketing and recruiting plans at the colleges also prevented effective promotional strategies. With limited staff, funds, and other resources, many community college recruiters and marketers are asked to do more with less. However, the lack of a formal plan hurts their efforts because goals and objectives cannot be measured and the use of resources cannot be evaluated. Strategies cannot be determined to be successful because their effectiveness is not based on any research or metrics.

Among the research not being utilized is the opinions and perceptions of currently enrolled students. College employees were not focusing on current student experiences to assist in developing messages for potential students. Currently enrolled students were also not being actively used in the recruiting process, but rather acting as passive promoters for their institutions.

Most of the recruiting and marketing focus of community colleges in the study was being placed on traditional students. Traditional aged students, just graduated from high school, provided the greatest number of potential students in academic transfer courses, rather than the more expensive technical programs offered by the community colleges. The lower investment in recruiting these students was desirable to college employees in the short run, but by not focusing on other targeted groups, the colleges cannot recruit a wider variety of students, which in turn could foster higher and more diverse enrollment numbers.

The Lack of a Cohesive and Collaborative Promotional Message

The majority of college employees interviewed in the study acknowledged that there is a lack of cooperation between the recruiting and marketing departments on their campuses. The exception to this was the opinions expressed by the college presidents interviewed. The majority of presidents interviewed presented a picture of cooperation among their departments in the formation and execution of marketing and recruiting messages. While one president admitted that the collaboration was not what it should be, the other presidents praised the cooperation they perceived at their institutions. The one president who recognized that there was needed improvement was Dr. Newmeyer of Eastern State Community College. She stated

> Well, I think it would probably be good if you had it (marketing and recruiting) coming out of one office, all the colleges that I have worked at in the past have had that and I think it works well that way. It is just not set up that way here. I think it would be too high of a hurdle to change. It would be disruptive for me to change given the personalities involved.

> Michelle, our public information officer, would be good to work with the recruiters, but the recruiters don't think about her. They are not on the same campus and it can be frustrating for her. The recruiters will schedule something and not let her know so she can take pictures. Administration offices are on this campus, but 4,200 students are on the other campus.

When asked about the cooperative nature of working with the other departments, Dr. Newmeyer's Public Information Officer Michelle agreed that there is room for improvement. Michelle described the working relationship as cordial, but not effective. For her it came down to an issue of personalities often disconnected by a lack of communication. Michelle explained that the recruiters receive their instruction from a different department, one that is used to doing things in a certain way. This practice extended to the follow up a potential student received once an initial contact had been made by the recruiters. In Michelle's opinion, she thought the college did not clearly explain to prospective students why the college wanted them to be students at

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Eastern Alabama Community College. The recruiting process described by Michelle consisted

of a letter being sent to prospective students with no follow up. She acknowledged that this

might be a time issue given that the recruiters also acted as advising counselors to students once

they were enrolled. Michelle said advisors and recruiters should be two separate positions and

admitted that she herself could do some more active recruiting for the college, but she was

prevented from doing this due to a perception that she might be intruding into the other

department and she did not want to "overstep."

This idea of overstepping was also something viewed from the Eastern State recruiter.

Both the recruiting and marketing departments seemed to have specific ideas about their

responsibilities and duties. Because these positions are not equal in the organizational chart and

the recruiter reports to a higher level administrator, there was hesitancy to offer opinions or

suggestions for each other's planning. This was evidenced from the answers offered by Eastern

Alabama's recruiter Janet. She stated, "Our Dean makes our assignments. We have a public

relations division that is different from the recruiters. Public Relations develops the written

material we give out." Any collaboration was limited to the sharing of information. "We can

offer suggestions to that department as to what students and parents have requested. The parents

and students have asked us questions so we can tell public relations what we are being asked and

then we can see what material works or doesn't work," Janet concluded.

The same relationship between the recruiting and marketing departments was common at

the other colleges involved in this study. At Western State Community College, the president

reported that the cooperation between departments was positive, while the Public Information

Officer and recruiter interviewed disagreed. The positive perception of collaboration was based

on the higher levels of administration rather than the ones actually involved in the day to day

exercises of promoting the college. Dr. Phiffer, president of Western State answered

> I think there is a good relationship; let me say that upfront. I think Western State tends to
> have a good relationship due to its nature, culture, history. I think it's a relationship that
> needs, as every good relationship does, cultivation at times, and I think it needs what the
> instructional office needs to be conveyed, and the student services officer needs to be
> conveyed, and what the PR person thinks needs to be conveyed are not necessarily
> exactly the same thing. So you have to make sure the things you want to cultivate are the
> things you need to cultivate.

Julie, the recruiter at Western State Community College recognized that there were some

positive aspects of the relationships between departments, but there was a need for improvement.

She, like her president, indicated that the relationship was influenced by the culture. However,

where Dr. Pfeiffer said the culture positively influenced cooperation, Julie disagreed. She

indicated that the departments are not organized in a way that benefit from a joint organizational

perspective. The recruiting plan and marketing plan was offered as an example. Julie explained

that the recruiting plan came from the Dean of Students and the marketing plan from the Public

Relations Director.   She viewed herself as an "idea person" when it came to developing

marketing messages, but not an active participant. This led her to admit that even her ideas were

not always listened to by the other departments. She portrayed the situation as being the person

who was hearing what is being requested by those she was trying to recruit, but it was not always

being incorporated in the development and practice of marketing because the other departments

and administration have already made plans for the year or allocated resources for those plans

leaving little room for modification.

This depiction of collaboration between departments was echoed by Annie, the Public

Information Officer at Eastern Alabama Community College. Annie reported, "We try to, once a

year, meet with the recruiters and get (ideas) from them, and see what they think because they

are out in the field, and based on their feedback about what they think is working and not working and based on their experiences, what you need us to develop for you." This interaction led to specific marketing products. "That is how we kind of approach it in developing things like the viewbook which is our mail piece for the high school students, and we really haven't done a good job in changing those messages for them in the last three years. We did not meet with the recruiters last year, but did the year before," Annie explained. Staffing resources were a constant challenge. Annie concluded, "But, that was because we were having a marketing study done and we decided to concentrate on non-traditional students and we have such a limited staff. Often times we don't plan ahead and we are putting it together at the last minute."

Of all the colleges involved in the study, Southern Alabama Community College's employees reported the most positive cooperation between the marketing and public relations departments. This positive reporting though did not reflect itself when asked about specific practices. Lee, the public information officer at Southern Alabama explained that the relationship among the departments has shown improvement in the last two years. He stated that it is much better than what it was in the past. He referenced the positive administrative influence for the change, explaining that the need for cooperation among departments was "built coming down; top to bottom." Lee noted that the college's administrative team worked together to ensure that mutual respect was cultivated to enhance collaboration.

The involvement of the college's administrative team was also referenced by Dr. Hathaway, the president of Southern State. His description of the process mirrored that of Lee's. Dr. Hathaway described a team of 12 to 15 employees discussing multiple issues related to marketing and recruiting. This included viewing commercials from "competition" like for-profit colleges as well as other institutions in the Alabama Community College System. As successful

as the process was, however, Dr. Hathaway did admit that "territories" can sometimes play a role in the administrative team meetings. "I promote openness and the ability to promote the best for this institution, so feelings are not a part of the equation," he explained.

The college's recruiter is not part of the equation either, at least when it comes to participating in the administrative team meetings. Adrian, the college's only recruiter, is not a part of the administration team, and while there was mutual respect for the public relations department, he reported that he is not involved with the development of messages or promotional strategies at the college. He explained, "Overall, I would say the relationship is good. But, you have to understand, I am a one man shop. I am it. I get support from the college's counselors, but I am the only recruiter." Adrian referenced the divide that existed between marketing and recruiting. "There are two sides to the marketing and recruiting here. It is driven by me or him (public relations). We work together, but we are not working together if you understand what I am saying," he said.

Formal Marketing and Recruiting Plans are not Utilized

Formal marketing and recruiting plans allow those in charge of recruiting students to plan, create strategies, and gauge success based on measurements. If there is little collaboration between different departments, then the task of judging the success of marketing and recruiting campaigns becomes even more difficult. Even with formal plans, recruiting can occur informally and spontaneously. As previously mentioned, recruiting is not limited to those employees whose primary responsibility is to promote their institution. Recruiting and marketing can be done by all employees of a college and it can be difficult to ascertain all the recruiting and marketing efforts done at a college. Competing strategies, messages, and delivery of the messages can create confusion as well. Without the cooperation of the different

departments needed to unify the messages and decide upon the course of action to deliver those messages, colleges run the risk of not reaching potential students who would benefit from the programs and services offered by the colleges.

Of all the college employees interviewed in this study, most were confused over the existence of a formal marketing and recruiting plan at their institution. They either did not know if there were formal plans, or they were unsure under what plan their colleges were operating. Some said there were plans, while others said plans were not used. For those who answered that they did have formal plans, none could produce the plans when asked for them. The plans, for those who answered they had them, were not formal written plans and none used metrics to evaluate the success or failure of objectives. Instead, the descriptions of most plans were a loose set of goals and tactics which were not formalized into an overall central document.

Two of the presidents interviewed answered that they did have formal plans, but neither could discuss any details of the plan. Dr. Pfeiffer of Western State Community College stated, "There is a lot of input coming from different areas; we have a very complex, almost cumbersome planning process. We have a marketing and recruiting committee with the Dean of Students, Dean of Instruction, Director of Public Relations." Dr. Pfeiffer continued by explaining the allocation of roles and ideas. "They all play key roles in that area and we believe in stealing or adapting any good ideas we feel might work. Then there is a marketing plan. We have four campuses with four campus directors. We have two people in public relations. We are spread out." In this case, the multiple campus locations and cultures impacted the marketing plan. "So as an institution we may decide to do 'A' on every campus, it will play out differently on each campus because of the needs of that area. I don't know if there are metrics for everything (in the plan), but there are metrics involved and we have a formal marketing and recruiting written

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plan." The conclusions underscore the challenge of a central message. "It is one plan for the college, but it is playing out in four distinct ways (based on the four communities they serve)," Dr. Pfeiffer concluded.

Julie, the recruiter at the same college was not aware of a formal marketing plan or of the planning process discussed by Dr. Pheiffer. She did however report that there was a plan used for recruiting. The plan detailed by Julie included specific markets which were assigned to her and the two part-time recruiters at the college. The focal point of the plan, like those of the other colleges was on the traditional student market. Julie commented that the recruiting plan "began with the high school market," but included some limited emphasis on adult education. The recruiting plan required each of the four campus-based recruiters to serve a high school in the recruiter's area. Julie explained that the plan had not been updated in the eight years she had been employed at the college.

Annie, Julie's colleague at Western State was able to provide a definitive answer about the college's formal marketing plan. There was not one. She was aware of the existence of the college's recruiting plan, but she had no participation in its development. She explained, "We do not have a formal marketing plan. We have never had one. We do have a formal recruiting plan. I can't tell you about it because it was done in a different department, but I can tell you there are different strategies." Annie further noted the how the plan insufficiently considers the diverse student enrollment. "There is a high school strategy and our institution is so complex. We have part-time recruiters to get in the high schools. I think the plan is successful with the high school market, but not the adult market." She summarized her experience at Western: "We are not big on formalized plans here."

While Western State may not be big on formalized plans, Annie did provide some insight on how the messages were developed at the college and this did include some planning. She noted:

> Up until this year, there was two people primarily in my department and we pretty much formulize, brainstorm and formulize, who we want to reach for the next year. And, it's pretty much us, and that is the way we have done it since I have been here and I have been here 19 years and I can't tell you how long I have been in this role. We are on our own. Sometimes, not often, we will look at the strategic plan and try to see what goals we should look into, but it is not formalized, I will just be honest.
>
> But this last year, we had a research company come in and they did some real research, true research that I had been fighting for for about five or six years. Based on those results, we have developed a strategy to try to reach the adult population, and again me and my assistant director came up with the ideas what we put in our ads as far as the outreach and what audiences we want to reach and things like that, but it was all based on research and it was the first time we had ever done anything like that. I am pretty proud of that, the fact that we actually did something based on research and not our gut feeling. Research was not typically used at other colleges either. When discussing his marketing

plan, Lee, the public information officer at Southern State explained that he did, at one time, develop a marketing plan, but he had not created one in the past few years. Instead it was a more informal plan developed after receiving input from his president. From Lee's perspective, this was also the case for the recruiting plan at the college.

Lee's answer was in conflict with the one provided by Dr. Hathaway, his president. Dr. Hathaway answered that there was a formal marketing plan and he described it as an "aggressive" one developed by Lee with the advice of an outside consulting agency. Dr. Hathaway illustrated the plan by discussing a video recently produced by the college. He mentioned that the video had won a national marketing award and pointed out that its production was a result of the planning process. He also stressed that the quality of the video would not have been possible had it not been for his dedicating funds for the marketing plan. But, like the other colleges, there was no mention of measuring the return on investment of the funds directed

for the video, or if its success could be measured within the context of a formal marketing plan that had goals and objectives.

For the formal recruiting plan, Dr. Hathaway answered that there was one, but Lee answered there was not. When asked to describe the formal recruiting plan, Dr. Hathaway offered no specifics, but described only tactics for recruiting high school students. As explained by Dr. Hathaway, the college's main recruiting plan was to meet with high school counselors twice a year to make sure they were informed about Title IV changes. These meetings would then lead the counselors to become "ambassadors" for the college and motivate them to recommend Southern State to their students.

The description of the recruiting plan provided by Adrian, Southern State's recruiter, mirrored some of what Dr. Hathaway had described. Adrian explained, "With the recruiting plan, there are certain times of the year, we are doing certain things, and then we add and subtract from that all the time." He described a recruiting plan that mirrored the academic calendar. "In the summer we are usually recruiting in public venues, like malls, sometimes churches. Then in the fall we are doing school visits. Spring, we usually do tours or financial aid workshops. In the summer it starts all over," he concluded.

When asked about metrics tied to the plan, Adrian explained that "you can use all the numbers you want, but it comes down to enrollment." When asked how the measurement of enrollment numbers was tied to the plan, however, he answered, "I can't say that we do that." The reason given was that the college may receive multiple applications from one prospective student which might skew the numbers.

The inconsistency and confusion regarding formalized written plans for marketing and recruiting was also evident at Eastern State Community College. When asked if her college had a formal marketing or recruiting plan, President Newmeyer answered:

> I don't know the answer to that. I do know that they are supposedly working on a recruiting plan. But since I have been here, I have not seen a written marketing plan. And, I have not seen a written recruiting plan. I have asked for a written recruitment and retention plan, but I imagine that this has been put on the back burner in getting ready for the fall registration, but I expect to see the plan this fall. But, I will say that the emphasis I wanted was on retention. I haven't asked about the marketing plan, but Michelle could tell you if she has that. But, I don't think we probably do, but it wouldn't be bad to have one, and she may have that.

When asked about the marketing plan, Michelle answered that there was a written formal plan, but it had not been redeveloped in years. She said the plan was "basically that our institution in our community will try to get the community informed through press releases and advertising, and we'll visit high schools." Michelle questioned why her department's plan did not include recruiting as well, and was not aware if there was a formal recruiting plan. She went on to say that the marketing plan was not followed very closely, and even though the plan had metrics, "I don't do that."

Just as there was uncertainty with the public relations department's awareness of a recruiting plan, the recruiting department was just as unaware of the existence of a marketing plan. Janet, the college's recruiter stated, "As far as there being a formal marketing plan, I don't have the privilege of that knowledge at this time." She was more aware of the college's recruiting plan. When asked about the research methods used in the recruiting plan, Janet answered, "From the schools we are assigned, we can research the students we get from the schools we are assigned. We are looking for numbers to see how much materials we need to take for future visits." Janet's answer was similar to those of the other recruiters at the different colleges. Each answered that the success of their plans was dependent on the enrollment

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numbers, yet none of them had access to the enrollment numbers and none of them could explain how they compare the numbers in order to gauge success.

The Colleges are Focused on Traditional Recruiting Methods and Recruiting Traditional Students

Recruiters and marketers at community colleges often are required to handle multiple roles at their institutions. The lack of additional employees can lead to adopting a strategy of actively recruiting students through traditional means. The typical recruiting events of college fairs, counselor visits, and campus tours supply recruiters with fewer barriers in reaching traditional students. Traditional students are not the largest prospective enrollment pool for community colleges, and are not necessarily the market the colleges should be trying to reach. They are however the ones that provides the most uncomplicated route in reaching. The combination of prearranged recruiting events and limited time for activities provides recruiters with an easier course of action than developing new ways of recruiting. Concentrating on these traditional strategies though limits the groups of nontraditional students in a college's recruiting pool.

While some college employees interviewed in this study reported that specific activities were done to recruit nontraditional students, the interviews showed that the majority of recruiting and marketing activities were designed for and targeted to traditional students. This was evidenced when recruiters were asked about the identifying of targeted audiences. All of the recruiters mentioned the colleges primarily targeted high schools. Janet from Eastern State answered, "We just use a general overview of the divisions, but if there is a specific interest in one, what we will do is get them to come to the college and get them in touch with that

individual." She explained her focus on traditional students. "Mainly I am a high school recruiter. We are reaching the high school students market as a target market," she concluded.

The other college recruiters were also confident that the high school market was being reached. Adrian from Southern State replied that between the public relations department and his department, he was confident that the college was doing an excellent job in its main service area. Outside of the service area, he was not sure. Regardless of the area, the main target group they were reaching was high school students. Like many of the other colleges, Adrian also made a distinction when it came to reaching career technical students rather than transfer and general education students. Many college employees and students interviewed agreed that the career education students could be described as more nontraditional than traditional.

While Julie also stated that the emphasis at her college had been on high school students pursuing general education courses, she mentioned that there seemed to be a change in the direction Western State Community College was taking with its other targeted markets. She explained:

> We have used a "Ya'll come" type of message, but I have noticed in the last couple of years there has been specific targeted messages to specific markets, but overall, since my time here probably well over half my time here, the messages have been ya'll come, but not literally, but just real open.

> What we did this year, based on the study that the company performed for us, we identified a decline in the adult market. So, all our public relations and marketing targeted the adult market. We are going to be very anxious to see if those efforts paid off through the next couple of semesters. But they have made a very pointed change on who we are talking to. We are also monitoring the traditional student. I am confident that all markets are decreasing and enrollment is just down so that is going to affect all markets. I don't think a student is not going to come based on us sending messages to just one market.

Julie's colleague Annie at the college elaborated on the marketing study done at Western State and its recommendation to focus on nontraditional students. She said, "You know we are

trying to be all things to all people and that is one of the things we tried to change this past year based on the research (the marketing company) gave us." She further emphasized the importance of nontraditional students. "We really focused on the nontraditional, so we really focused on the adult market and career tech and things of that nature on what an adult population would come back to. Our employees were not happy with what we did." This reaction prompted a change in the message. "So we went back to a broad based message, and I just don't think they got it. They thought how can you just target one group? How can you not speak to costs?" Annie spoke to the challenges of balancing institutional expectations with enrollment metrics. "We got pressure to go back, and that is the first time in my career that I got pressure, and what is so funny to me is that we based it on research. They didn't believe in the research," she concluded.

Annie's counterpart at Eastern State Community College Michelle echoed what she had to say in terms of engaging in target markets. Michelle's own confidence level was not high in the practice. She described her college's marketing as being "very generic" and trying to offer something for everyone, yet really concentrating on the high school market. Michelle explained that the college rarely engaged in any targeted marketing. The majority of marketing was done before registration periods began and it was traditional. This was also found to be the case at both Western and Southern State. Annie from Western State even mentioned that the marketing firm hired by her college had reported that their practice of only advertising during registration periods was one of the main reasons the college's enrollment had not grown in the last year. At Southern State, the main advertising periods reported by Lee were also done right before registration periods and all reported using traditional means of communication to promote the dates.

Adding to Michelle's lack of practicing target marketing was an experience that occurred when she tried to do some target marketing that was not centered on registration periods, but was for a specific program instead. The campaign was for a truck driving program at the college. To target potential students, Michelle explained that she worked with the local cable company and the college's career center to identify television programs to advertise on to reach possible displaced workers. Michelle said, "We ran the commercials for about six months. I tried to find out if anyone referenced those when they enrolled, but I never could find out what the numbers were." Based on this experience, Michelle stated that she was less likely to try additional target marketing because she had no way to measure its effectiveness.

If there was uncertainty from the recruiters and public information officers that they were reaching all their targeted audiences, with the exception of the traditional aged students, the majority of their presidents strongly agreed that they were at least reaching the traditional student market. Each president interviewed said they were confident that their colleges reached traditional aged students. However, one president, Dr. Pfeiffer of Western State acknowledged what her recruiter and public relations director had said regarding a lack of confidence in reaching nontraditional students. She reported:

> I am very confident that we reach the high school market. I am not at all confident we reach the adult market. Annie does a report after every term and that is helpful, but the reason I can say I am not confident about the adult market is (the report) is skewed to younger students, which is good because it means that they are not wandering around out there in the job market looking for the career that they need, but it also is showing that we have a lot of people over 25 that could benefit from (the college) too.

While the marketing and recruiting strategies seemed to be designed more to reach traditional aged students, the delivery methods of those strategies were traditional as well. An overall lack of innovative marketing and recruiting techniques were reported by all the colleges. Not one college employee or student interviewed could clearly explain any innovative marketing

or recruiting methods engaged in within the last year. Most participants provided traditional means of message development, implementation and delivery, and practices when asked about innovative techniques. Even when specific questions about innovative methods were asked and examples given, those interviewed could not illustrate any clear inventive strategies or tactics.

Like the other examples given by the other colleges, Eastern State Community College described their innovative recruiting approaches with traditional examples such as campus tours, visits to high schools, the college website, and brochures. Janet, the recruiter, mentioned a new printed sheet that included employees' phone extensions. She explained its novelty, "What I have see light up on parents' faces is having a sheet with phone extension numbers on it. Communication is so key to recruiting." The sheet was popular with parents. "So if a student or parent wants to ask a question of financial aid or admissions, or testing, the way our phone system is set up if it asks if you know the extension. It helps to have it on that sheet, so I think that has been one of the best tools. Pencils are always good too. Everyone likes a free gift."

Techniques for marketing were not met with much more originality as reported by the colleges. Both Dr. Newmeyer and Michelle mentioned the same college initiative of publicizing their institution's 90th anniversary when asked about innovative marketing strategies and practices. Dr. Newmeyer admitted that she was not sure if the campaign was innovative, but it was something that could be used in both the marketing and recruiting efforts of the college. Michelle was more straightforward in her conviction that the 90th year celebration was not that innovative, but it was at least something new for the college. She described the college as "not being terribly innovative." For her, the 90th anniversary advertising was an outreach in the community and an opportunity to have the college employees become involved with community

activities. Michelle explained that, in her opinion, the campaign was not to increase enrollment, but was more of a "feel good, thank you for supporting us for 90 years" opportunity.

Janet did not mention the anniversary when asked about innovative marketing techniques. She did mention the college's Facebook page, but also explained that while innovative, it was not something she used to recruit students. She said the Facebook page was "innovative as far as people being able to see it. As far as recruiting, we have not really, had the opportunity to use it." The Facebook page at Eastern State Community College is administered by Dr. Newmeyer's secretary and Michelle. Both Newmeyer and Michelle agreed that the college's Facebook page was used more for informational purposes rather than marketing and recruiting practices. Dr. Newmeyer was not positive about the use of Facebook. She explained:

> I hate it. People can go out there and say anything and start a panic so they have to check it several times a day. I am terribly concerned about the tie to social media and students today, but you have to do it, but it is a double edged sword. We use it more as a conduit for information rather than marketing and recruiting. I don't know how many students are using it for information about what college to go to.

The students interviewed at Eastern State reflected this assumption that the Facebook page was more for information for currently enrolled students and not really for incoming students. However, when asked how many of the students were aware of the Facebook page and asked about its content, all three were not even sure if they had "liked" the page. One mentioned that she had seen the page once when she was checking to see if the college had been closed during a time of inclement weather.

The postings on the Eastern State Facebook page showed that the majority of the content is informational and directed more towards currently enrolled students. Of all the colleges included in this study, Eastern State had the largest number of "likes" with over 3,000. However, it was also the only college that did not have a link to its Facebook page on the

homepage of its website. Its content showed that the employee's perception that the content was more informational and designed for currently enrolled students was correct. The postings ranged from information about parking passes, student government elections, and the college's emergency alert system. Questions from students included ones regarding registration information and the financial aid process.   The photos included on the page contained several albums which depicted student life. The photos ranged from staged photos that were identical to the ones found in the college's publications, to more natural looking photos of campus activities. The subject matter of most photos by far centered on athletic events at the college. From the interviews with the students at Eastern State, the ones who attended classes on the campus that housed athletics, said that sports were a major part of that campus' culture. Yet, none of the athletics' photo albums on the Facebook page had any likes or comments associated with them, and other than the names of the sporting events, had no descriptions. The album that had the most comments or likes associated with it concerned the crowning of the Homecoming Queen, and this one did have tags and a description of who the students were in the photos.

The students interviewed at Western State Community College reflected much of the same opinions as the ones at the other colleges regarding the use of social media at their college. Of the three students interviewed, all of them mentioned that they were aware of the college's Facebook page, but none could describe its content and tell if they thought it was used for recruiting students. Also, none of students were aware that the college had a Twitter page. Susan, a traditional aged, criminal justice student said that she thought the college should use Twitter for recruiting. She explained that many people her age were on Twitter and that it was "a huge thing now, just like with Facebook. If they could just let more people know about it, I think it would help them get more students to the college."

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Facebook was the only social media mentioned by employees of Western State when asked about its use. Although the college does have a Twitter feed, it is tied in with its Facebook page and does not operate as a separate tool, but rather an extension of it. Annie explained it was more a lack of staffing for this than anything else:

> We're not really doing a good job with that at all and again it comes back to staffing. There are only two of us. We are trying to work five locations, we don't have anyone dedicated to social media, and so what we try to do is, we have a Facebook page, (my coworker) tries to check and I try to check. Both of us try, and I am saying try, come in in the morning and check it. I check it at home because I am also checking questions on the website.

> We did give the recruiters admin rights to the page and if there is an event on campus they are great about posting photos. We bought each campus a camera and they have been great about posting photos…But, mostly it is information like registration dates. It has worked well to give others access. It is hard to manage.

Giving the recruiters administrative rights to the Facebook did not provide them with a motivation to post anything on it, according to the recruiter Julie. She explained she felt that the public relations department handled all of the college's social media recruitment, but she did not know why that was. From the posts she had seen on the page, she felt the department was only answering some of the student's questions and posting some pictures. She also expressed what others at Eastern State had observed, that the Facebook postings were information designed for currently enrolled students more than perspective students. The only exception was the posting of registration dates.

Registration dates were posted to Western State's Facebook page, but the majority of comments on it were done by students looking to buy and sell textbooks. Postings by the college included the aforementioned registration dates, but there was also one posting about a recruiting event that was taking place in the community. There were no likes or comments associated with the page and no additional photos once the event had occurred. The majority of the postings by

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the college were photos of campus events, but with little to no comments under them and none of the photos appeared to have been "tagged." While the individuals in the photos appeared to be traditional aged students, there were some photos of non-traditional students included as well, but there was no description used to identify them as students. The same photos were also on the college's website on a page called "College Photos." Again, there were no descriptions about the photos. Western State had the most Facebook postings of any college, both by the institution and students, than any of the other colleges. They had close to 3,000 "likes" on the page, but still fewer than Eastern State. As indicated by Annie, the college's Twitter feed was just an extension of the Facebook postings with copies of the Facebook posts being tweeted. Sometimes the tweets were cut off due to their length. Western State had 71 Twitter followers. The college's YouTube channel had 43 subscribers, but there had not been any new content posted for over nine months. The content that was there included short videos about specific programs, college commercials, and virtual tours of some campus buildings. One video, posted over a year ago, was specifically targeted to adult students. It told the story of "Jane" a non-traditional student who, after her husband had died leaving her with children to support, achieved her GED at Western State then entered the college's nursing program. With the exception of the campus tour videos, it was the least watched video on the YouTube channel.

When asked about the most innovative technique adopted for recruiting or marketing at the Western State, none of the employees could name one, but they all mentioned the college was doing something "different" rather than describing it as innovative. Julie mentioned that the focus on the adult market was "not really innovative, but it is different from anything we have ever done." Annie also mentioned the focus on the adult market. She reported, "Trying to tailor those messages for adults was something we had never done before. Was it innovative? I am

not sure. It was different." Dr. Pfeiffer could not think of an innovative approach from the last

year, but she said that what they were doing was different than what had been done before and

that it was "just more of an intensive focus" than previous approaches.

The students interviewed at Western State agreed with the college's employees on what

they saw as a lack of innovative approaches for the marketing and public relations of the college.

However, they did not agree that the approaches were different. Ivy, saw the marketing and

recruiting methods as repetitive, while Violet saw them as being designed only to recruit students

out of high school. Susan agreed that the methods were the same and all designed to reach

traditional aged students.

Ivy was the most vocal about the lack of innovation. A non-traditional health sciences

student, Ivy said:

> I just don't see it being innovative at all. I just moved back here from Texas where I had
> been enrolled at a college there. Their commercials were innovative, they were doing
> things across a broad spectrum and they have a tremendous amount of students. We
> could use some of that here.

A lack of innovation was also commented on from the students of Southern State

Community College. Like their counterparts at the other colleges, they were very vocal about

the lack of innovative methods. Also like the other students, each student interviewed at

Southern State had a hard time answering the question, even when examples of innovative

techniques were given. Ultimately, all of the students mentioned a traditional form of marketing

and recruiting when providing an example. When pressed about this and given further

explanation that the methods mentioned were typically done by other colleges, Rose, a second

year transfer student said that it she felt her examples were innovative because Southern State

had never done anything before, so just by doing something different, it was innovative. Another

student, Lillian, agreed with Rose saying that the commercial she had recently seen for Southern State was innovative because before that she had never seen a commercial for the college.

The perceptions of Southern State's employees differed from those of the students when it came to the level of innovation regarding their marketing and recruiting. Each employee felt that the college was being innovative in its approaches. When asked specifically about the most innovative marketing and recruiting approach the college had done in the last year, again each college employee referenced at least one traditional means of communication as an example of innovation. Answers ranged from the use of displays and brochures at college fairs to commercials and videos, to visits with high school seniors and their counselors.

The use of social media was also discussed by those interviewed, but like some answers from the other employees at the different colleges, there was uncertainty about which social media outlets were used at their respective colleges. Also, there seemed to be no policy to handle its content. Adrian explained, "The use of social media is increasing. Facebook, Twitter. Questions come to me through Public Relations from questions posted and they transfer that to us, or to admissions. So, social media role is increasing." He outlined how the process of sharing information worked. "All of our social media is done through public relations, any questions we might receive. If Lee doesn't answer it, he sends it to me and I answer it." Adrian expressed uncertainty over the types of social media used by the college. "I am not sure about Twitter, I think we have one; well yes we must have one because I have seen it on our website. We are not really using that as a tool for recruiting. Not sure about Youtube, if we have one," he concluded.

Lee's responses also added confusion about who exactly was in charge and monitoring the social media outlets. Adrian said that Lee's department was handling it, but Lee said it was

being run through an Admissions employee. Lee explained how the college was using social media:

> We like to put success stories on our Facebook. If it runs in the paper, a nice good story about a student, you know we will get some good response from time to time. I have the account, but honestly I don't have the time to monitor it. Facebook is so time consuming. But I have a young man in the admissions office who does that for me. He is an employee. And, nine times out of ten it is an admissions question anyway. Or maybe eight times out of ten. So even if I did monitor it, or someone in my office, it would wind up and go to admissions anyway. I think current students use it more because it is about registration dates. But we also get prospective students too. Generally we let them ask the questions. The marketing end of it comes when we post the success stories. Hopefully that will inspire them to come.

The content of Southern State's Facebook postings was accurately reflected by Lee. The page contained postings about student success stories and other features linked back to the college's website. It had the least amount of postings by any college or their students compared to the other colleges in the study. It also had the least amount of page likes with a little over 1,000. Like Western State, the college's Twitter page appeared to be an extension of the Facebook page with postings linking back to it. The college had 62 followers. For the college's YouTube page, the number of subscribers equaled 6 with a total of 10 videos uploaded. The content was all recruiting videos or television commercials and no new content had been added in 10 months. One video, named "Recruiting Video" was a five-minute video that was first posted almost two years ago. The video depicted a young woman who spoke directly to the camera and introduced herself as "your tour guide." She described programs, admission procedures, and introduced some college employees. The woman never introduces herself as a student, and from the descriptions of an average student provided by the students at Southern State, she did not depict what they would consider to be the average student other than her age. The woman in the video is also depicted as using social media as a way of communicating to others about the benefits Southern State.

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When asked if social media was used more to convey information to currently enrolled students or if it was used more as a recruiting tool, Dr. Hathaway was adamant that it was more of a recruiting tool. He said that the college's social media was actively used by current students to recruit new students. He stated, "You see we have ambassadors, student ambassadors and they have certain taglines about recruitment on Facebook, all positive things about the institution."

Dr. Hathaway's view and the images used in the recruiting video appeared to be inconsistent with what was reported by the students at Southern State. All of the students interviewed identified themselves as student ambassadors during the interview, yet none of them reported that they had ever posted anything to the college's Facebook page. Lillian said, "Youtube, Facebook, it needs to be run by the students, not by the faculty. Right now it is run by the faculty. There are no students on the Facebook page. We should do it; and we should do Youtube." She concluded, "They should pick certain students to actually do Youtube and Facebook."

Involvement of Currently Enrolled Students in the Development of Marketing and Recruiting Messages and Strategies

From the interviews conducted for this study, it can be determined that input from currently enrolled students does not play a role in the development of marketing and recruiting messages and strategies. Messages were developed within different college departments with very little collaboration among public relations and recruiting. This lack of collaboration extended to currently enrolled students. With the lack of feedback from students in regards to contributing and evaluating marketing messages and strategies, college officials were not gaining beneficial knowledge from an in-house group of experts. The majority of students interviewed

said that peer recommendations played a role in their decision to enroll at their colleges. However, no college incorporated using students actively in their recruiting or marketing strategies. The only obvious example of student involvement in the marketing and recruiting practices at the colleges was their inclusion in publications and visual promotion pieces.

Each student, regardless of their college, answered that their enrollment was influenced by a peer or family member and none of them were actively recruited by the college. Many students also reported that they chose their colleges based on information they found themselves rather than information received by a college recruiter, high school counselor, or a college publication. No student indicated that they had ever met a recruiter or participated in a specific college recruiting event. The main promotional tool used by the students was the college websites and few had seen any social media or traditional media about the college before enrolling at their colleges.

What little communication did exist between college employees and students appeared to focus on traditional age students rather than the diverse student populations found at an average community college. The majority of college officials interviewed in the study said that marketing and recruiting traditional students was easier to do than developing specific messages for target markets. Some of the reasons for this were that traditional students typically enroll in more popular offerings such as health science programs or general education programs, and that there were more existing, prescheduled recruiting events designed for these types of prospective students. Given this account, it was not surprising that almost all the college officials gave a description of a traditional aged student when asked to describe their colleges' average student.

Each college employee at Western State Community college described their average student as aged 18 to 25 years old; predominately female; worked fulltime; and received some

type of financial aid. With the exception of one student, this description also was appropriate for the Western State students interviewed for this study.

The college employees at Eastern State also gave common descriptions of their average student too. Employees reported that the majority were traditional aged, worked some type of job, were average high school students before they enrolled at the college, and were local to campuses they attended. Michelle expanded her description to detail the average student at each of the college's campuses. She explained:

> A student on Campus A is here because they want the college experience. They want to participate in some type of activity, or we're convenient for them. It is more of a rural setting, but there are athletics and fine arts on this campus. The student on Campus A is also the traditional college student, but the one on Campus B, unless they are in a skill transfer program, they are there to transfer to (a state university). It is going to be more of a commuter setting there.

This was true based on the interviews done with the Eastern State students. Holly, a nursing student in her 20's said, "I am not sure about this campus (Campus A) because I am on the other campus (Campus B), and there are middle aged mothers in my program there, but for the college I agree that the students seem to be right out of high school."

When asked how students might describe their colleges to other prospective students, there was general consensus among all college employees interviewed. All said that students would have a positive description of the colleges. Specific answers were low student teacher ratios, the support of instructors and other college employees, accessibility and convenience, and affordability. All of these descriptors were also mentioned by the students. Fern, a transfer student in her early 20's mentioned all of them in her answer. She said that she would begin her recommendation with the instructors because they had been "so nice and willing to help with anything, and definitely the location and price because I got to stay home two extra years."

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Susan, the criminal justice student at Western State, also referenced the help students received from instructors. She explained that students were happy at the college and happy to be a college student because "they know they don't have to worry about anything and if they need help they can get it." She went on to describe small classroom settings which offered a better experience than those at larger schools where the classrooms are "like a hundred people."

Ivy, one of Violet's fellow students, and a non-traditional student, remarked about the assistance students will receive at the college, but put it in the context of a non-traditional student. She said, "I have friends, people older than 30 who are hesitant about coming to school. They think they are too old, but I tell them you will get the help you need for school. You will succeed here." Ivy concluded, "There is a place for everybody and something for everyone to learn. I have found my place, and they will too. It is just getting that out to them and convincing them to come."

As previously mentioned, the descriptors most frequently used to depict the college by the students and employees included faculty support, convenience, and affordability. To determine if these concepts were being used in the colleges' current marketing and recruiting messages, I examined many of the institutions' publications and websites. Of the three colleges involved in the study, only one had all three concepts in their printed materials and in the same publication – Western State Community College.

Southern State's class schedule referenced accessibility and convenience but not faculty support or affordability. In Eastern State's viewbook, instructor experience and hands-on, personal attention were mentioned, but aside from financial aid information, no reference was made to low tuition and there were no comparisons to the cost of a four-year institution even though the college's employees and students all referenced in their interviews the fact that

Eastern State was a feeder school to a large state university. Western State had the largest number of publications available, but only one publication, the college viewbook, mentioned all three of the most commonly described benefits. The accessibility, caring instructors, and affordability were all referenced.

The student images used in Western's state publications and on their website had much in common with the ones from the other colleges. Photos of traditional aged students dominated throughout. Significantly, even in one publication designed for Adult Learners, the images used are predominately those of traditional students. There were little to no images of nontraditional students represented by the other colleges. Diversity of students was represented instead by students of different races and gender. In some examples, there was equal number of demographics represented. For example, Southern State's schedule shows an Asian student, an African American student, and a Caucasian student leaving a classroom building together, but from the student interviews conducted at Southern State, this is uncommon. The recruiting video posted to the college's YouTube channel visually represented more diversity than the students described, except when it came to nontraditional students. Images of nontraditional students were dominant when showing career technical programs, but absent from other portions of the video. The video did detail affordability, accessibility, and caring staff through visual and verbal descriptions.

Summary

This study interviewed community college presidents, public information officers, recruiters, and students to discover how marketing and recruiting messages were developed and delivered at their colleges. The responses provided much reflection from those involved, because from their own answers, they had never really been addressed before in the context of

this study. It was evident that the college officials interviewed were passionate about marketing to and recruiting students, and responded with open answers, even if this sometimes included recognition of their own shortcomings in their promotional activities. For the students involved, the focus groups lead to a better understanding of how they fit in to the recruiting and marketing processes and allowed for reflection on how they themselves were recruited. The findings of the study highlighted the need for better internal communication, research, collaboration, and examination at the colleges in order to better serve the students and positively impact enrollment numbers.

CHAPTER V:

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was conducted to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals at Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. Of primary concern was the examination of the strategies and approaches used to market and recruit a diverse group of students while developing messages designed to speak to individual needs. Community colleges have conventionally used an approach of marketing to everyone as a potential student given its traditional mission of affordability and accessibility. The struggle to develop too specific messages may not appeal to the widest possible audience given limitations of resources and personnel. An examination of the recruiting and marketing methods of Alabama community colleges can enhance the effectiveness of message development and help to evaluate the level of success in reaching their intended markets.

Alabama Community College System personnel and the students they serve can benefit from this study and the conclusions reached from it. The need for research on this topic is high given that most enrollment studies examining recruitment and marketing methods concentrate more on four-year institutions rather than two-year colleges. The most important benefit from this study will be for the employees tasked with developing marketing and recruiting strategies at their respective colleges. It will provide insight on how to improve collaboration and cooperation within their colleges among the many departments involved with promoting their colleges and its services.

With the typical organizational structure in place now, Alabama community colleges operate as separate departments divided into recruiting and marketing. The separation of duties and responsibilities can create miscommunication and failed opportunities for collaboration. Given the lack of resources and personnel at many of the colleges, the need to eliminate obstacles in developing effective recruiting and marketing is a paramount concern for college employees. Just as important is the need to effectively communicate to the potential students who can benefit from the services of the college. Many potential students may not receive communication in regards of the benefits of a community college education given the lack of effective methods of communication and the wrong message communicated. In this dissertation, to assist in the examination of how Alabama community colleges market and recruit their institutions, I considered three research questions:

1. How do college employees collaborate across organizational departments to develop marketing and recruiting messages;

2. How do community colleges utilize formal marketing and recruiting plans to reach potential students; and

3. What are the marketing and recruiting messages being sent by the institutions?

In this study, the president, public information officer, recruiter, as well as currently enrolled students, were interviewed at three community colleges in Alabama. From the data collected in the study, the investigation of how Alabama community colleges market and recruit students indicated that a lack of formal planning to develop promotional methods, messages, and measurements negatively impact the execution of an institution's marketing and recruiting efforts.

In this chapter, I respond to each of the research questions that guided this study. I also provide conclusions and implications on my research findings for the colleges involved in this study as well as the Alabama Community College System. I conclude with prospects for future research related to the Alabama Community College System and other community colleges.

How Do College Employees Collaborate Across Organizational Departments to Develop Marketing and Recruiting Messages?

Marketing and recruiting professionals at the Alabama Community Colleges involved in this study operated as separate divisions with little collaboration being conducted in the development of marketing and recruiting messages. While the development of the promotional messages was not always in conflict with one another, the lack of a cohesive partnership created confusion and led to mixed messages being sent to potential students. The environment at the colleges between departments was not antagonistic, but there was much room for improvement.

There was no thought to developing messages specific to targeted audiences. This was due to a lack of resources, staffing, and research at the colleges. College employees also explained that it was easier to recruit traditional aged students rather than non-traditional students, and given the lack of needed resources it was better to develop broad based messages to reach the largest number of students possible, rather than focus all the resources on multiple target markets that were difficult to reach.

Just as there was little collaboration between the different departments at the colleges, there was no collaboration with currently enrolled students in developing marketing and recruiting messages. Even though the students interviewed in the study explained that peers or family members played a key role in their enrollment decision, college employees did not seek student input in developing messages for any student group represented on their campuses.

Student opinions were not solicited regarding promotional messages or strategies; instead what feedback did occur seemed to come only from the highest level of college administrators.

The development of the colleges' promotional messages was important to the college, but many of those responsible felt the need to do the most with the resources they had. This led to the traditional messages of offering something to everyone in hopes that a generic message will appeal to the widest group possible. The recognition that the colleges did face these limitations in developing messages for marketing and recruiting caused some institutions to seek new ways to conduct message development and deployment. However, resistance to change and a lack of support from all employees caused some to abandon new strategies prematurely.

How Do Community Colleges Utilize Formal Marketing and Recruiting Plans to Reach Potential Students?

Formal marketing and recruiting plans allow college employees to gauge the effectiveness and success of campaigns. While the adoption of a formal plan does not guarantee increased enrollment, they provide goals and objectives that can be measured in predetermined cycles. Formal plans also provide marketers and recruiters with empirical evidence to show those in charge of resources the specific needs. Without the assistance of a formal plan, marketers and recruiters are "flying blind" and gambling on what might and might not work for their marketing and recruiting efforts.

From the evidence of this study, colleges were not engaging in any written formal marketing or recruiting plans. There was confusion at the colleges as to what constituted a plan and there was little agreement if plans were used. If there were plans being used, they were not developed with any cooperation among the departments. Plans for recruiting and marketing

were developed separately. There were no tangible measurements associated with the plans

which led to no clear evaluation methods to judge success.

Descriptions about the methods in place were more accurately described as tactics rather

than formalized plans. Recruitment tactics in particular appear to rely on traditional means and

emphasized recruiting traditional students. There were no formal plans for reaching

nontraditional students or any other targeted audience. Plans were not used to address the

different needs of multiple campus colleges or specific programs. While social media and other

emerging techniques were used by all the colleges, there was no incorporation of these methods

in any planning conducted by the colleges.

What are the Marketing and Recruiting Messages Being Sent by the Institutions?

The marketing and recruiting messages being used by the colleges were the same broad

traditional messages that have been used by community colleges for years. The idea that

everyone is a potential student and that the colleges offer something for everyone was reflected

in the interviews conducted with the college employees. A broad message to recruit the largest

number of students is most often used, yet the images and messages appeared to primarily target

traditional college students.   As previously stated, this was due in part to a reported lack of

staffing and resources to develop and execute targeted messages.

The most often mentioned concepts used to describe the colleges were affordability,

accessibility, and faculty commitment and support. These are all traditional messages used to

promote community colleges. In the context of the messages developed by the community

colleges in this study, these concepts were consistently used, but were inconsistent in always

being used together in the same promotional piece or tactic. They were also not framed in a way

that speaks to individual students, but rather once again were presented to appeal to the widest possible audience.

The broader messages of offering something for everyone can still be used to recruit students, and can easily be adapted to reach targeted audiences. However, if the traditional message is delivered only by traditional means, it will not be successful in reaching its intended audience. Recruiters and marketers need to investigate how their intended audiences are receiving their messages. If they hope to reach the widest audience possible, they must adapt the broadest messages in to a context that is relatable to specific audiences.

Recommendations from the Study

Effective marketing and recruiting strategies and practices at Alabama community colleges are vital for the colleges and the students they serve. Colleges must reach the largest number of possible prospective students to ensure enrollment and benefit from the funding it brings. Students who do not receive the proper information to make the correct enrollment choices face obstacles in their educational and career goals. Too often in the past, community colleges have tried to be all things to all people and developed marketing messages with this philosophy only to miss enrollment opportunities from targeted audiences. The lack of funding and staffing resources has added to this practice. Marketing and recruiting professionals are often asked to do more with less. This practice has led to less than successful promotional strategies and practices.

By combining recruiting and marketing into one collaborative and centralized department, community colleges could benefit from added staffing and resources. It would also lead to a more collaborative team approach to convey marketing and recruiting messages. Traditionally, recruiting has been a function of student services. While there is no doubt

recruiting can be looked at as an extension of admissions and enrollment, it is more closely related to marketing in nature and therefore a better fit to be part of the overall college marketing department. The combining of marketing and recruiting would represent a significant cultural change for most colleges. Recruiters are often given additional duties in student services. These duties are often related to registration and counseling. The colleges could temporarily assign the recruiters to admission during registration periods, but it would be important to have recruiters be first and foremost recruiters and employees within the college's marketing departments. The level of collaboration received from both departments joining forces would greatly increase the effectiveness of a college's marketing and recruiting efforts.

The need for formalized, collaborative marketing and recruiting plans is great at the community college. The plans should address the needs of the college and the needs of the students and should be tied to the mission of the institution. The plans should have measurable outcomes that can be used to determine the success or failure of the marketing and recruiting strategies. It should have timetables to give the college employees the needed time to gauge effectiveness. The formalized plans should be communicated to all employees of the college to ensure it will be followed and supported by the entire college since marketing and recruiting often occurs informally and spontaneously. Also of importance is the use of research in the plan. Part of this research can be accomplished by soliciting the feedback of currently enrolled students. Students provide a valuable resource to marketing and recruiting professionals. Their perceptions and opinions collected in a formal study and incorporated in the written plans will add validation to the strategies developed and help make sure the methods developed are applicable to those it is trying to reach.

Any marketing and recruiting plan should address the possibility of target marketing. Recruiting at the colleges is designed more for traditional aged students and this needs to be examined. Nontraditional students are often overlooked in the development and practice of marketing and recruiting methods. At a college where everyone is looked at a potential student, the marketing messages should not passive. If marketing and recruiting professionals want to reach underserved individuals and open larger ignored markets to increase enrollment, they must engage in effective target recruiting as well as marketing. If resources are an issue and prevent target market, it is possible that the colleges could cut back on some of the traditional marketing and recruiting practices for traditional students and redirect the resources and time to reaching nontraditional students. Free methods of new and emerging communication and marketing, such as social media could be incorporated in the target marketing if they are shown to be valuable. However, like all forms of marketing, social media needs to be done well and consistently and measured to understand its level of usefulness.

Finally, professional development opportunities need to be identified for college marketers and recruiters. As previously stated, the organizational culture of community colleges assigns employees specific tasks and roles within their intuitions. Many employees are given these roles to accomplish without the sustained professional development that is always needed. While professional development would be beneficial for both groups, the priority would be for recruiters. Recruiters can come from different professional backgrounds. Some have student services experience. Some have teaching experience. Some have backgrounds in communication. Whatever the case, all recruiters would benefit from professional development designed to enhance their assigned recruiting duties. The majority of the recruiters interviewed in the study reported that they needed and wanted professional development, relevant

professional development.   Recruiting methods have not remained stagnant, yet for many colleges they have not updated the way they recruit. People cannot perform the same tasks they have been performing for years and receive the same results. Professional networks comprised of other recruiters within the system would also be valuable to the recruiter. Like the professional development groups for marketers, recruiters need to communicate with colleagues to identify best practices within the system. From the data collected, recruiters explained that there was little interaction with recruiters from other Alabama community colleges except when they saw each other at recruiting events. Establishing a networking base for recruiters could help in the sharing of ideas and strategies for the System as a whole. Recruiters and marketers at the same college would also benefit from participating in the same professional development activities or organizations to help foster the same ideas and methods. Professional development activities for marketers could include supervisor training, if the marketing and recruiting departments are combined with the public information officer being the head of the department. An additional professional development opportunity might be grant writing to assist in securing additional funding for targeted marketing of specific programs or student populations. A summary of recommendations appears in Table 5.

Table 5

Recommendations from the Study

_____

  Recommendation

_____

  1. Recruiting and marketing departments should be combined into one centralized department.

  2. Formalized, collaborative marketing and recruiting plans should be used by the colleges.

  3. Colleges should engage in target marketing.

  4. Professional development opportunities should be identified for marketers and recruiters.

_____

Implications for the Guiding Framework

The guiding framework for this study was influenced by Blackburn's *Development of a Marketing Plan* (1998) for enrollment management. His plan presented a cyclical process outlining six components. These components included

  1.   developing a market audit and market goal development;

  2.   analyzing market opportunity;

  3.   setting market objectives;

  4.   developing and stating marketing strategies and tactics;

  5.   implementing the marketing plan; and

  6.   assessing the marketing plan.

The components should be looked at as stages with equal importance.

The research conducted for this study provided an opportunity to expand and enhance the plan and each of its components. The data collected from this study identified areas specifically for community colleges that were not outlined in Blackburn's plan. These included the

organizational cultural of community colleges and the traditional job duties found within that culture.   However, this does not mean that the process outlined is not beneficial. It just means there are implications to consider for those who are planning to use Blackburn's plan. This dissertation identified three implications to consider. First, the plan could be developed specifically for community colleges. Second, those using the plan should utilize a workable timeline. Finally, the plan could be compartmentalized at a college, yet still be one overall model comprised of the different departments.

Blackburn's process was not developed exclusively for community colleges, and while there may be some limitations in applying its components specifically to community college marketing and recruiting, the six components still provides the needed tools to guide a marketing and recruiting plan at any type intuition. Each component can be expanded upon to fit better with the traditional mission of the American community college and help marketers and recruiters in developing their promotional plans. The development of targeted audiences in the *Analysis of the Market Opportunities* stage is a vitally important piece for community colleges. It can assist in determining message development and communication preference of potential students.

Creating a specific, workable timeline for applying the plan and gauging its success is another factor to consider when implementing the plan. The research in this study revealed that the colleges were not engaging in any new or innovative methods of recruiting and marketing. The few examples of new strategies were not given time to be properly assessed. Because Blackburn's process is described at cyclical, those using the plan must give it enough time to accurately measure its effectiveness, but also know when enough time is sufficient. The "along-the-way- assessments" discussed in the process become more important for community colleges

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because many times the resources devoted for marketing and recruiting are at risk of being reduced. The setting of specific assessments along a timeline will help the college and its planning process.

Creating support for the use of formalized plans does not guarantee success, but it can lead to a better chance for success. The *Implementing the Plan* stage addresses the need for institutional support. While the process should be used as an overarching plan for the entire college, developing sub-plans within specific programs or on multiple campuses could increase participation, understanding, and collaboration. Much like the unit objectives used in institutional effectiveness plans for colleges, Blackburn's plan could be adapted for program specific goals. The narrower goals would still be a part of the overall marketing and recruiting plan, but by focusing on program or campus needs, detailed issues would receive attention. It would also lead to greater understanding for college employees about how they fit into the college's promotional plans and provide support to the marketers and recruiters if resources are limited for staffing.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further studies on the topic of recruiting and marketing within the Alabama Community College System could be expanded to additional colleges. The colleges selected for this study represent several types found within the larger system. Similar types of colleges could be selected for study to see if those interviewed provided similar responses. Furthermore, colleges that were specifically different from the ones in this study could be investigated to determine if differences existed.

In addition to different colleges within the system, different employees at the same institutions used in this study could be interviewed. Specific employees such as admission

directors, Deans of Students, and faculty members could be involved. The perspective of all these employees would provide additional insight to the conclusions drawn from each college.

Expanding the student demographics for future research might also prove to be beneficial. Most of the focus groups interviewed in this study were homogenous. A more diverse group of students could expand the findings. Conversely, a group of students that were comprised of a specific target markets would be of benefit in evaluating the effectiveness of specific promotional message development and delivery. Former students, both those who have completed degrees and those who left their colleges before completion, would also make for an interesting cohort group.

While the focus of my study was on the recruitment and marketing of new students, there would also be benefit in the examination of currently enrolled students. Often retention is not thought of as a part of recruitment, but there are several parallels with this study and the importance of communicating to and retaining currently enrolled students.

Currently, there is very little research on higher education marketing and recruiting methods and even less specifically for community colleges. It is my intent that additional research will be conducted to expand on this study. Future research could also be conducted through quantitative methods as well as qualitative methods depending on the preference of the researcher.

Limitations

This study included interviews with college presidents, public information officers, and recruiters at three community colleges in the Alabama Community College System. These college employees are directly involved with developing the marketing and recruiting strategies

at their colleges, but they are not the only college employees involved. Therefore there were some decision makers that were not part of the study.

There are a number other colleges within the system and three technical colleges. Because the technical college's missions are somewhat different than the community colleges, the technical colleges serve career tech students more than academic transfer students, the same conclusions reached from this study should not be directly inferred for the technical colleges.

Of the students interviewed in this study, all were female. While there was no evidence of gender bias on the part of the students interviewed, the fact that no male students were involved could limit the findings of the study in terms of gender-specific perceptions.

The qualitative interview approach of this study was designed to provide participants, both students and employees, with an open opportunity to give their candid opinions. Even though participants' privacy was protected, their opinions may reflect a personal bias to depict their institutions in the most favorable light in case they felt their opinions would be seen by others at their colleges.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how marketing and recruiting professionals within Alabama's community colleges promote their institutions. Of primary interest in the study was the examination of how individuals responsible for marketing and recruiting develop their marketing and recruiting messages and strategies. These individuals included the president, the public information officer, and the recruiter. In addition, students participated in a focus group in the study to help determine their perceptions and opinions about the marketing and recruiting of their college. The college employees interviewed revealed that there is a lack of collaboration between marketing and recruiting in developing marketing and

recruiting messages and strategies; that there is no formal marketing or recruiting plans being utilized at the colleges; and that students are not involved in the development of promotional messages and that most messages are being targeted to traditional students.

The marketing and recruiting departments at colleges should be more collaborative and considerations should be made to combine these departments to share staffing and other resources. The lack of communication and cooperation from the departments can also be rectified by the use of formal written marketing and recruiting plans. The plans should incorporate goals, timetables, and measurable outcomes. The plans should also address the issue of specific target audiences to recruit. The current practices at colleges are designed more for traditional aged students rather than the more diverse student base usually found at community colleges. Methods of using social media or innovative practices to market to and recruit students should be investigated. One way to accomplish this is through participating in professional development activities. Professional development activities, especially for recruiters, are needed and can assist college employees with identifying best practices.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Do you feel your college offers something for everyone?

2. Tell me about the role you play in marketing and recruiting your institution.

3. Tell me about how marketing and recruiting strategies are developed at your college.

4. If you have a formal marketing or recruiting plan, tell me about it.

5. Is there one overall message you think your college uses to recruit students?

6. How do you develop your marketing and recruiting messages?

7. What do you feel is the relationship between different departments at your college when it comes to marketing and recruiting?

8. What research methods are utilized when developing your marketing strategies?

9. Do you think you use broad messages in your marketing efforts?

10. How do you identify target audiences in your marketing efforts?

11. How confident are you that you reach your intended target audiences?

12. Tell me about the role social media plays in your marketing and recruiting efforts?

13. Describe the most innovative marketing or recruiting approach your college has initiated in the last year?

14. How dependent do you think your college enrollment is on the economic climate?

15. What resources do you think you need to improve the way your college markets and recruits students?

16. Do you feel it is easier to recruit one student to your college or a group of students?

17. Describe your college's average student?

18. How do you think this average student would describe your college in recommending it to a peer?

19. What is the greatest challenge your college faces in recruiting students? In marketing its mission?

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Do you feel your college offers something for everyone?

2. Tell me how you think marketing and recruiting strategies are developed at your college.

3. Is there one overall message you think your college uses to recruit students?

4. Do you think your college's marketing and recruiting personnel use broad messages in your marketing efforts?

5. How confident are you that your college reaches its intended target audiences?

6. Tell me about the role social media plays in your college's marketing and recruiting efforts?

7. Describe the most innovative marketing or recruiting approach your college has initiated in the last year?

8. What resources do you think you need to improve the way your college markets and recruits students?

9. Do you feel it is easier to recruit one student to your college or a group of students?

10. Describe your college's average student?

11. How would you describe your college in recommending it to a peer?

12. What is the greatest challenge your college faces in recruiting students? In marketing its mission?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

June 14, 2012

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
R E S E A R C H

Christopher Franklin
Higher Education Administration
College of Education
Box 870302

Re: IRB # 12-OR-220: "Something for Everyone: The Marketing and
Promotion of Alabama Community Colleges"

Dear Mr. Franklin,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for
your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46.
Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but
not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language,
communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research
employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation,
human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on June 13, 2013. If the study continues beyond that
date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you modify the
application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form.
Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when
necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the
study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure (Investigator) form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB-stamped consent form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this application,
please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance
The University of Alabama

Informed Consent Form

Study title: Something for Everyone: The Marketing and Promotion of Alabama Community Colleges

Christopher Franklin, Doctoral Candidate, The University of Alabama

You are being asked to take part in a research study.

This study is called *The Marketing and Promotion of Alabama Community Colleges*. The study is being done by Christopher Franklin who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Mr. Franklin is being supervised by Dr. Karri Holley who is a professor of Higher Education at the University of Alabama.

Is the researcher being paid for this study? The researcher will receive no payment for the study.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?
This study is being done to find out how Alabama Community Colleges promote themselves and recruit students.

Why is this study important or useful?
Knowledge derived from this study is important in order to learn how colleges conduct recruiting methods.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?
You have been asked to be in this study because you are an employee of the college involved with recruiting and marketing, or you are a student who represents a specific area of interest.

How many people will be in this study?
A total of 9 administrators and staff will be interviewed and 9 students will participate in focus groups. All individuals will be selected from three community colleges in Alabama.

What will I be asked to do in this study?
If you are a college employee and agree to be in this study, you will be interviewed about your experience and knowledge of your college's recruitment and marketing methods. The personal interviews will be conducted on your college campus and will follow a standard set of interview questions. Each interview should take no longer than 90 minutes of your time. The interviews will be audio recorded. Once the data has been collected from the interviews, the recordings will be deleted and/or destroyed.

If you are a student and agree to be in this study, you will participate in a focus group as one of three students in the group and be interviewed about your experience and knowledge of your college's recruitment and marketing methods. The focus groups will be conducted on your college campus and will follow a standard set of interview questions. Each focus group should take no longer than 90 minutes of your time. The focus groups will be audio recorded. Once the data has been collected from the focus groups, the recordings will be deleted and/or destroyed.

How much time will I spend being this study?
Each interview should take no longer than 90 minutes of your time.

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Will being in this study cost me anything?
The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?
You will not be compensated for being in this study.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?
There no foreseen risks to anyone participating in this study. Your participation in the study will be kept confidential.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?
You may experience some beneficial understanding of your college's marketing and recruiting methods. Although you may not benefit personally from being in the study, you may feel good about knowing that you have helped others in developing marketing and recruiting methods.

What are the benefits to science or society?
The results of this study may help improve recruiting practices and may help contribute to the current study and literature of marketing and recruiting practices.

How will my privacy be protected?
You will be interviewed in a private room and told in advance what you will be asked about. Employees of the colleges will be assigned aliases and their replies will not be shared with other employees from your college. For those participating in the focus group, your responses will be kept as confidential as possible and will not be shared with employees or administrators at your college. *You will not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.*

How will my confidentiality be protected?
For individual interviews, any data obtained from the study will be kept confidential on a private computer. Individuals will be assigned an alias and you will not be identified by name or any other description that can identify you. Recordings will be erased after their use.

If you participate in a focus group, your identity will be protected as much as possible by the researcher. I will request others in the group to keep the discussion confidential, but I cannot guarantee this will happen. Your participation in the interviews and the focus group will not affect your relationship with your college.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?
The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?
Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama or your institution.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

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Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call Christopher Franklin at (205) 901-3551. You may also contact the faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Karri Holley at (205) 348-7825

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it.

I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

College Employees: Are you willing to have the interview audio recorded? _____Yes _____No

Student Participants: Are you willing to have the interview audio recorded? _____Yes _____No

_____   _____
Signature of Research Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

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