

Recruiter or Anti-Recruiter?

The College Instructor's Role in Marketing

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With a freshly minted doctorate in inorganic chemistry, I set my sights on a lifetime of college teaching. I had decided to teach college so that I would never have to take any education courses, which I considered boring and useless. I was going to be a college professor and that was that, nothing more, nothing less.

But teaching also taught me something about myself. Mid-career, I decided to go back to school and study for a Master's degree in education. Now I teach those "boring and seemingly useless education courses" myself!

So, teaching one subject or another, I have been a college/university-level professor for most of my professional career, serving in three institutions in India and the United States. Over the years, I have concluded that there are four things of significance that a college or university has to offer as recruitment devices: *academic programs/facilities, money, students, and faculty!*

It goes without saying that a sound academic program and good facilities are needed for recruitment. New buildings, slick brochures, campus tours, pizza on the mall, mouse pads, T-shirts, pencils with the university's name on them and a welcome speech

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by the president all have their place. They are important in the recruitment process but not primary. I am not going to talk about the power of money and scholarships as a recruitment tool or about the place of students in marketing a school; these will be dealt with by other authors in this issue. While my niece was attracted by the scholarship offered by one Adventist college, it was the quality of the faculty and a further scholarship that made her transfer to another Adventist college, from which she graduated.

Faculty have a vital role in the recruitment process. I am well reminded of what my curriculum professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga said concerning teaching: "You will be teaching values in your classes. You have no choice!" It can likewise be said to the faculty, "You will recruit. You have no choice!"

Some of the recruiting is overt, like selling insurance or automobiles, but most of it is long-term and more subtle than telemarketing. For good or bad, all teachers play a part in the recruiting process, but they can choose to involve themselves in a variety of activities that will further enhance their school's attempts to recruit and retain students.

Here are some ways in which teachers can and do participate in recruitment:

Good Teaching

"I'll go anywhere and do anything so I won't have to take a class from that professor!" The reasons given: the teacher is boring, nasty, arrogant, unreasonable, puts down women, etc. Professors may not achieve the same credibility with all students, but if we don't have credibility with a majority of students, then we become anti-recruiters. There was a day when students took classes from professors whether or not they were good teachers, but those days are over. More and more students are avoiding classes that they perceive as being poorly taught. The "student advising network" is often much more powerful than faculty advising. Most Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities are within a 30-minute drive from several other schools where students can enroll—often for lower tuition! And a \$300 airplane ticket will take a student from one Adventist campus to another, so it becomes even more important that we take recruitment and retention seriously.

Unfairness is probably a teacher's most devastating anti-recruitment behavior. This occurs not only when teachers humiliate or unfairly favor certain students, but also when they set grading requirements that make academic success not just a challenge, but virtually impossible. Distraught students complain to their friends

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about tests that ask for insignificant details, or about teachers who offer no guidance on what is important to memorize or how to organize and study the vast amount of information in certain subject areas.

Some teachers have even been known to deliberately add "trick questions" to quizzes. By resorting to such behavior, teachers damage student esteem and motivation—as well as their own reputation and that of their institution. Professors should keep in mind the model of the Master Teacher—encouraging, challenging, and engaging students, not discouraging or tricking them. Good teaching means creating an environment that encourages success and provides clearly defined expectations. This requires teachers to be positive and nurturing, well organized, and committed to helping their students learn.

It is difficult to determine how many students are lost to our campuses as the result of poor teaching or how much money is lost when students avoid poorly taught or unreasonably difficult classes. Every course cannot be exciting and fun, but every teacher must seek to make his or her classes interesting and engaging, creating an ambiance in which inquiry is encouraged and students are respected.

Perhaps a more serious problem is why academic administrators often fail to identify poorly taught

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classes and work with the instructors to improve them. In my 40 years of teaching in Adventist higher education, my teaching has been observed only once!

Teachers do influence students on an individual basis, but they can make more of an impact when a whole department is full of great teachers. Since students spend more time taking courses in their majors and minors, teachers in each department need to work together to see that students have a positive experience in earning their degrees. Good teachers are crucial to the success of a department. "The faculty in my department has everything to do with its quality—morale as well as outstanding musicianship. The faculty both take care of the students and provide first-rate musical training," notes Monte Fleming, a junior music major at La Sierra University.

Another marketing plus for Adventist higher education is its small student/teacher ratio. Adventist students take courses from seasoned professors and interact with them in laboratories and offices, rather than having graduate students teaching classes and proctoring laboratory work. The students who are serious about school know that they have a better chance of doing well when the teacher knows them by name and is able to interact with them on an individual basis.

Know Your Students

Even though their classes are small, Adventist teachers are busy, with committees to attend and many other things clamoring for their time. They need to make an effort to get to know each student personally. I once taught a class in which I didn't learn the names of the students. Over the quarter, I kept giving papers back to the wrong students and calling them by the wrong names. One student's response was acrimonious and bitter because of it. "I can't imagine why any student would want to attend classes at a college in which the instructor didn't take the time to learn the names of the 12 students in the class!" he complained to the dean. As a matter of fact, I haven't

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seen this student on campus since. It was after that experience that I began to use name cards. I also make sure that the students have my office and home telephone number, and I encourage them to contact me about their academic and personal concerns.

Engage Students in Scholarly Pursuits

It is important for professors to engage in thoughtful pursuits and to invite their

students to participate with them. This can occur in a variety of ways: conducting research in the laboratory or off campus, assigning projects that have real-world usefulness, writings that lead to publications, community-service activities, etc. Students thus engaged will come back to the campus and will encourage others to enroll.

Teachers need to keep learning and growing. Each year should add new experiences and new insights to their teaching, rather than simply providing another 12 months of credit toward retirement. Sharing of new ideas and developments through lectures and assignments indicates to students that they are sitting at the feet of a person who's excited about his or her subject, and will get them excited, too. They will seek out classes from such teachers, and will recommend them to others.

Listen to the Students

The student's daily interaction with teachers is often the most influential part of school. If students have a really great teacher, they will tell others. The stories they tell often encourage curious students to seek out classes by the "great" teachers/professors. Jason Colgrove, a junior at Loma Linda Academy in California, says of the influence of teachers, "I feel that the teacher has a big impact on students, even more than the educational system. For me, at least, if a teacher is interesting or unique in a way, no matter what the class is, it can be interesting."

Teachers need to be aware of the importance of their interactions with students. "It's the students who validate our presence on campus," explains Edna Maye Loveless, professor of English at La Sierra University. "They stay if we value their expectations. We're on call to become, upon demand, academic gurus, parental nurturers, and socializing presences," she adds.

The comments students make about teachers should not go unheard. If a professor is getting poor evaluations from students, that teacher—and the school's administration—should take notice. Students

talk to one another, and soon one student's negative experience is known by many. Letting students know that their comments are taken seriously reassures them that they are valued and respected as part of the educational process.

Teachers can also choose to involve themselves in a variety of activities that will enhance their school's recruitment and retention. Here are three ideas to get you started:

Involvement in K-12 Classrooms

Just recently, I greeted a student who was signing up for an advisement time outside my office door. She asked me if I recognized her. I didn't. She said, "You came to my 5th-grade classroom and did puppets with us. It was then I decided to become a teacher." While many things have probably influenced her career choices in the past nine years, I think I can take some credit for influencing her to become a teacher, and choosing to train on my campus!

The doors of K-12 classrooms are wide open for professors to share their expertise and experience. It's a very effective form of long-term recruiting.

Home Visitations

While this may rank low on the priority list for college and university teachers, it can be a powerful recruiting tool. For a number of summers, I visited prospective students in their homes, at youth camps, and at their summer jobs. I saw myself not as a hard-sell recruiter for the college but as an educational consultant. I advised students to attend schools other than the one I represented when I thought it was in their best interest. I strongly encouraged them to attend a Christian college. Of course, I emphasized the strength of my home campus, but I expressed genuine interest in their welfare. The result: Most of them came to my campus! I believe effective recruiting means being interested in each potential student. Is this strategy overwhelmed by the lure of a generous scholarship? Perhaps, but a combination of the two will make a school very appealing.

Involvement With Leadership

As an education professor, I have more opportunity to get involved with church

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educational leaders than teachers in other disciplines. Yet even as a chemistry professor, I worked with educational superintendents, academy principals, and ministers, as I taught Sabbath school classes and gave workshops for pastors. If college and university teachers make themselves visible through a variety of interactions with church leaders and laity, administrators will be impressed with their scholarship, spiritual depth, and willingness to be of service outside the classroom and will look more favorably on sending their own children to our schools and encouraging others to do so as well.

A Final Word

Schools often get caught up in the fancy stuff of recruitment like the size and color of their brochures and big college-day programs. They fail to realize that the most powerful recruiting and retaining tools come from within the school. What is the

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impact of the faculty and staff? What are the students saying? Are they constantly complaining to their family and friends or are they raving about how great things are? The teacher's influence affects the whole school and extends far beyond. It touches the student now, and has the potential to continue throughout his or her life—and into eternity! This influence can be a school's greatest asset or its biggest liability. Great teachers and happy students are fail-safe tools for recruitment and retention. ✍

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During her time at LSU, she had the privilege of taking one of Campbell's "boring and seemingly useless education courses."