

IS YOUR INSTITUTION UNIQUE?

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Educators in the United States are constantly reminded of the significance in the diversity that exists in our higher educational arena. One does not have to look very far to get the gist of what is being said from one end of our country to the other:

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences has published the view that—"The more important argument for a dual system, public and private, however, is one of educational variety... The major private institutions are important precisely because they guarantee that higher education is not pushed toward uniformity and political hypersensitivity."¹

A writer for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education—"...recommends the pluralism of the colleges, reflecting the pluralism of the society—diversity ranging all the way from the religions to the new 'radical' studies... students are increasingly transferring from one institution to another for a term or a year, and could well benefit from an environment very different from the one they had first chosen. Pluralism includes not only differences in religious or philosophical perspective, but also differences in the characteristics of students or supporters and different innovations which may be risky or unpopular."²

A Professor of Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has written that—"The structural characteristics which set the United States system of higher education apart from other systems are a combination of differentiation, standardization, and integration."³

The Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities in the State of New York has taken a stand that—"It does not mean that our private colleges and universities are 'similar' to our public colleges and universities. There are conspicuous differences in size, internal organization, physical attributes, scale and program."⁴

The President of Saint Louis University and the 1972 Chairman of the Association of American Colleges has said that—"We have seen that the quality of overall American higher education could diminish without the healthy competition and the potential for innovation and variety of style provided by our private sector."⁵

The writer of a profile of small, private colleges has written that such colleges—"help to maintain the diversity of our higher education system, in which each type of institution plays a distinctive role in the division of labor."⁶

It would appear that the importance of institutional individuality to meet the needs of the diverse population seeking post-secondary educational experiences in the United States is not a prime subject for debate.

What is probably more a subject for discussion by many college administrators is the answer to the question, "What does this awareness and feeling of support for identifying the uniquenesses of institutions mean to us?"

One obvious concern that should be considered in every case is the fact that effective college recruiters must know the institutions that they represent as well as a skilled surgeon knows the anatomy of a human body. Anything less will not do, especially in the decade of the 1970's which threatens the continued dynamic viability of higher education in general and of private higher education in specific.

When the various sectors that compose the community of the authors' college were informally polled concerning what they thought were the unique characteristics of our college, the most definitive consensus we were able to note was that "the college provides a solid liberal-arts education for those who elect to follow that course and the college also provides a host of professionally-oriented programs in the arts and sciences and in business administration. Co-curricu-

lar activities abound in every area." In essence, everyone had a general feeling that the college was very much like most other colleges of the same size.

Our similarities to other colleges certainly would be of little or no help to our recruiting and admissions efforts; therefore, it was deemed highly desirable that a profile of the College be developed as promptly as possible, outlining the unique and special aspects of our academic and non-academic offerings so that students, faculty and administrators would have an instrument close at hand to represent the College to prospective students, parents and the community in the most positive and realistic way possible.

The results of a questionnaire sent to a random sampling of colleges across the country indicated that most other colleges had limited expertise in the development of such a profile. We initiated a project that involved just about everyone connected with the college by asking them to submit their personal description of the unusual and unique aspects of the offerings in their area, department or office. The information was collated and then verified for accuracy. Our efforts resulted in the following document which was given wide distribution to the college community:

What is unique about _____ College? Anything? A lot of things? It is common knowledge that _____ College is one of three campuses of _____ University. It provides 4-year degree programs in Arts and Sciences, Education, Business Administration, as well as graduate programs in Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Library Science. Many already know that _____ College is located on a beautiful 350-acre campus, 25 miles from _____ City and that it is a private, non-sectarian, coeducational institution with an enrollment of approximately 4,800 fulltime undergraduates, 2,000 part-time undergraduates and 3,700 graduates.

But did you know that _____ is much more to many people because it has:

Instituted a Bachelor's Degree on Environmental Science and Conservation which is unique in the _____ Community...

one of only 60 colleges and universities throughout the country chosen by the Academy of American Poets to participate in its Poetry program...

a grant from the State Manpower Training Act for a pioneering program believed to be the only one of its kind in the United States, to retrain out-of-work engineers for new careers as secondary school teachers...

a Nuclear Science Laboratory available for use by high school students from throughout the _____ and _____ area, under a grant from the Atomic Energy Commission...

become the first four-year college in _____ State to offer dual certification to education majors in Health and Physical Education...

an integrated field experience in secondary teaching which integrates methods and student teaching in one professional semester. An opportunity to relate the psychological, social, historical and philosophical aspects of education in one six-point integrated team taught course...

a Bachelor's and Master's Degree Program in Criminal Justice, the first of its kind on _____ the _____ Graduate Library School of _____ College; one of only 55 schools throughout the country accredited by the American Library Association...

continued to sponsor the American Indian Committee; the only committee of its kind in the United States...

a Chemistry Department that is accredited by the American Chemical Society; only 300 schools across the country have such accredited programs...

a unique, newly-organized Production Laboratory in theater studies in which students are involved not only in rehearsal and public performance of theater production, but in the process of the selection of the play and director in continual evaluation of production goals and accomplishments. (This laboratory also allows for many student-oriented production experiences, including student-written plays, with a maximum of artistic freedom)...

a program in Biology which introduces the high school senior to the college environment and to the research laboratory through cooperative efforts with various local schools...

a new program offered by the Graduate School of Education emphasizing the preparation of teachers for exceptional children, and the teaching of reading...

the distinction of being among seven colleges and universities in _____ State, offering the Master's degree in Management Engineering or similar programs and it ranks first in enrollment with 360 students and first in degrees granted, last year with 115. Moreover, of 62 schools offering similar programs in the United States and Canada, _____ College ranked second in enrollment and second in degrees granted...

a graduate program in Marine Science which offers in-service environmental training to educators, engineers and Coast Guard personnel, on

campus and at extensions at Governor's Island and Sperry, as well as a degree program . . .

over 90 non-credit courses for personal and professional enrichment both on- and off-campus each semester . . .

over 2,000 classes which run from 8:00 in the morning to 10:30 in the evening. In addition, a comprehensive summer program is offered with over 600 courses and over 700 sections . . .

a unique Weekend College program which includes the following innovative aspects: payment by credit card, a coordinated program with a private school, (Creative Arts Series) and both graduate and undergraduate courses, presented in a unique intensive classroom and consultative format . . .

the first exclusively upper division college (all entering students must have an Associate Degree or its equivalent) in _____ . . .

an upper division program for Registered Professional Nurses which functions exclusively out of Weekend College, leading to a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Nursing, enabling students to "learn while they continue to earn." This program began in September 1972 with the admission and registration of 130 students . . .

an innovative program known as F.A.S.T. (Freshman Academic Study for Talented High School Seniors) providing high school seniors with the opportunity of taking their freshman year of college with college professors while in high school at the high school . . .

a training program for individuals of various backgrounds in Drug Education at the _____ Hospital making use of the Continuing Education Unit concept that is now receiving national recognition . . .

a complete Tax Library which has all of the current tax volumes and tax periodicals—the only one of its kind in the East . . .

established an international organization—Academy of Marketing Science—with fellowships in nine foreign countries . . .

a 3-2 Program (five years) leading to a Bachelor of Science/Master of Business Administration Degree . . .

a health service center operated by one of the leading metropolitan hospitals which offers both on- and off-campus services to all students in many specialized areas not usually offered at any college . . .

an all volunteer Crisis Intervention Center which operates for both the college and the community, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, during the academic year . . .

an academically-oriented residence hall program

where over 300 students live in a residence hall which is primarily self-governing and where conditions for academic achievement and academic related programs are maximized . . .

an American Theater Festival: Production of an American play each year, with lecturers, a fashion show, dinner, exhibit of furniture, etc., recreating the year in which the play was first performed . . .

a Spring Mini-Semester: A four-week period of intensive study undertaken in courses specially designed to realize the benefits of continuing and concentrated examination of a single subject . . .

a Lifelong Learning Program in which tuition-free courses are made available to all graduates of _____ College throughout their lifetime . . .

a full summer field course in Geology and Geography has been and will continue to be held in various locations, preferably overseas in order to introduce our students to cultural environments other than their own . . .

A Psychology Department which has pioneered in the application of personalized instruction techniques. The work of this department has achieved national recognition . . .

a Bachelor of Science program in Radiological Technology, the only one in its field in _____ and _____ counties . . .

a graduate Medical Technology program, one of only 16 such programs offered in the United States . . .

an automated registration and scheduling system which eliminates long lines for students, allows advisors to avoid burdensome clerical activities and assists students in obtaining times and teachers of their choice . . .

a student recruitment office within the Admissions Office out of which student recruiters function to give applicants to the institution a candid and perceptive view of _____ College . . .

a research program involved in multispectral-remote sensing and is presently utilizing the data collected by Earth Resources Technology Satellite (ERTS) for the management of the earth's natural resources . . .

a program in Critical Languages that offers such languages as Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Hindi and Brazilian Portuguese via an intensive self-instructional method . . .

a World Language Center which investigates the various languages of the world and studies dialect variation and linguistic geography . . .

an individualized program in the study of Spanish and German in which the student can set his own pace of study . . .

a Graduate School of Business truly devoted to serving local industry . . .

a Speakers Bureau which supplies the services of our faculty and administration to various groups throughout the _____ metropolitan area...

an Honors Program designed to provide talented students with an enriched education. Programs of independent study are planned to meet individual needs...

introduced a new major leading to a B.A. in International Affairs. _____ College is the only college in _____ State offering a B.A. in this major.

The effects of the above "Unique Aspects" document was most rewarding and somewhat surprising. In essence the campus discovered that in many unexpected ways the assumption that _____ College was "pretty typical" just was not true.

The Admissions Office reported that the piece has proven to be most helpful in our recruiting and promotional efforts (corroborated by enrollment figures).

There are also some early indications that the in depth understanding of our unique characteristics enabled us to achieve a better student/college match which we hope will result in a lower attrition rate.

The *esprit de corps* (internal public relations) was greatly improved. Mutual admiration, respect and pride in the activities of the various departments within the campus became evident.

The community at large appears to have reacted favorably to the information we provided. This external public relations will obviously be of great benefit for our development activities.

Conclusion

From the foregoing description, it can be seen that every institution has both general and particular aspects to its past, present and future and that these aspects combine to fashion a unique school of learning that needs to be known as such by the staff inside and the public without. The recruiting team in Admissions is the crucial link in that process. How well it communicates that sense of uniqueness will be a direct relation to how well it succeeds in its mission of recruiting students for the future.

It is time for all institutions to discover how unique they really are.

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