

**The Sixth National Conference for Accelerated Programs in Higher Education
Commission on Accelerated Programs
Roundtable Paper**

Conference Topic: Best Practices in Marketing Accelerated Programs

Paper Title: “Principles and Practices of Marketing to Adult Students”

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Luke Dowden is presenting this paper on behalf of the Louisiana Continuum for All Louisiana Learners (CALL) statewide steering committee.

Background Information

During the 2006-2007 academic year, Bossier Parish Community College and Northwestern State University participated in a partnership with The Louisiana Board of Regents, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and the Consortium for Education, Research, & Technology of North Louisiana (CERT), to launch a pilot program known as the Continuum for All Louisiana Learners (CALL).



Education...Go for more!

CALL is a statewide initiative addressing the educational needs of adult learners in Louisiana, a growing population with impact on the state’s economic development, even more so following the hurricanes of 2005. More specifically, the pilot project set out to devise a potential model for how Louisiana’s public postsecondary institutions could design learning opportunities, expand targeted student support services, establish greater opportunity for the recognition of prior learning (both in more effective credit transfer policies and prior learning assessment programming), and accelerate or “fast track” learning options. All of these efforts were designed to attract, indeed to entice, adult learners to attend or return to college with the goal of completing degrees. Furthermore, CALL was targeted as the first installment in Louisiana’s **Education . . . Go for More** campaign focused on increasing educational attainment in the state and sponsored by The Louisiana Board of Regents.

CALL targets three distinct groups of potential learners:

- Adults who attended college but stopped short of earning a degree,
- Adults with no college experience, and
- Adults with a college degree who want additional credentials for career advancement.

Marketing to Adult Learners: One State's Approach

Both CALL institutions, Bossier Parish Community College and Northwestern State University of Louisiana, used three strategies to accomplish the goal of enrolling more adults in the postsecondary educational pipeline:

- Detailed Market Research and Analysis;
- Program Development, Course Design, and Delivery;
- Adult Learning Campaigns including a strong message and outreach efforts to make adults aware of new learning opportunities.

This paper discusses two of these strategies: *Market Research* and *Adult Learning Campaigns*. Program development activities focused on designing courses in 4 week and 8 week formats for 100% online delivery as well as adding portfolio assessment components at both institutions.

Market Research

The CALL steering committee confined initial market research to a 22 parish area in North Louisiana spanning from the Texas border to the Mississippi border. Two types of market research highlighted the educational needs of potential adult learners as well as uncovered how adults receive information about educational programs.

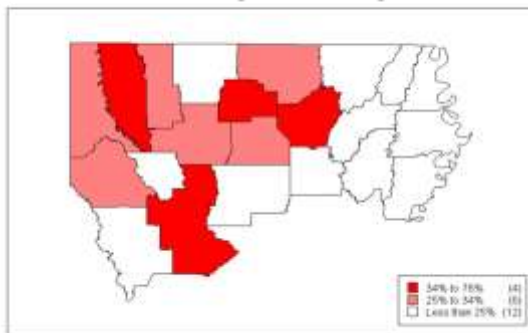
FREE Market Research. This type of research makes use of readily available data and reports from public and non-profit sources related to educational trends. Some examples of free market research used in planning adult learning campaigns include: labor market reports from state and regional Department of Labor offices, census data, and statistics from the state and regional offices of Education. These sources of market research contextualize the size and scope of the problem and “bring home” the need for action to state, system, and institutional leaders and policymakers. Furthermore, colleges and universities gain a better understanding of workforce needs and an increased appreciation for the economic development implications of introducing new programs and services targeting adults.

In Louisiana, colleges and universities benefit from their state's membership in the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). SREB (2007) is “a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works with leaders and policy-makers in 16 member states to improve pre-K through postsecondary education.” The organization “assists state leaders by directing attention to key education issues; collecting, compiling and analyzing comparable data on P-20 education; and sharing its analyses of actions and issues that

help states and institutions form long-range plans and policies”(SREB, 2007). In addition to regional reports, SREB publishes a *Fact Book on Higher Education* highlighting trends and analysis of those trends affecting education in the Southeast. Log onto to www.sreb.org for more information.

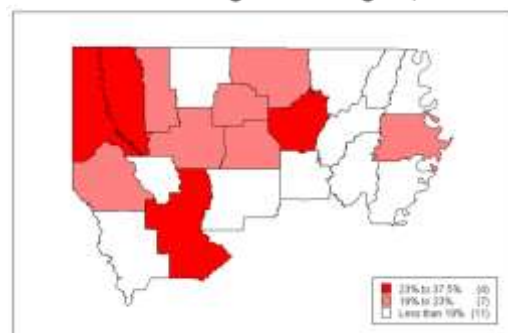
SREB produced a wealth of regionally specific educational attainment data for Bossier Parish Community College and Northwestern State University as demonstrated by the following examples. These slides and other supplemental data provided by SREB assisted in narrowing the regional scope of the adult learning campaign.

CERT Region Adults (18 to 24 Years Old)
with Some College — no Degree, 2000



SREB Adult Learning Campaign Source: U.S. Census Bureau as reported on www.higheredinfo.org

CERT Region Adults (25 to 44 Years Old)
with Some College — no Degree, 2000



SREB Adult Learning Campaign Source: U.S. Census Bureau as reported on www.higheredinfo.org

Access to this type of information and resources is available nationwide through the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). NCHEMS (2007) is “private nonprofit (501)(c)(3) organization whose mission is to improve strategic decision making in higher education for states and institutions in the United States and abroad.” This organization provides free access to a web-based interactive database of postsecondary educational statistics through the **Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis** accessible at <http://www.higheredinfo.org/> (NCHEMS, 2007). This interactive site provides a wealth of statistical information useful for colleges seeking to attract more adult learners. Other sources of information helpful in making decisions on marketing to adult learners can be found at the National Center for Educational Statistics website at <http://nces.ed.gov/>.

Professional Market Research. The free market research allowed Bossier Parish Community College and Northwestern State University to understand local, state, regional and national trends impacting the enrollment of adult learners. However, this information is limited in providing institutions with a deeper understanding of what might capture the attention of potential adult students motivating them to take action by asking for information or enrolling in a course offered by a postsecondary educational institution. Also, the available data does not indicate adult interests, access to opportunities in higher education, or how interested the adult market is in returning to learning.

To address the need for more detailed information about the adult student market in the 22 parish region of Northern Louisiana, the CALL steering committee contracted with the Aslanian Group (www.aslaniangroup.org) to conduct a survey and prepare a report. This “demand analysis” led to a second and more detailed study entitled *Adult Learner Demand in Northern Louisiana* (Aslanian Group, 2007). The report provided an in depth analysis of postsecondary educational demand in 22 parishes, pointed out program delivery options, and policies and practices of interest to adult populations that attract them to postsecondary education. This study focused on two specific potential adult learner populations: (a) Adults with some college but no degree and (b) High School completers with no college. The results of the first study are discussed below as this target population was the first priority of both institutions in recruiting adults into the postsecondary educational pipeline.

The Aslanian Group collected data through telephone screening and survey tools to provide the most accurate results about a specific target market(s) to colleges and universities. Results of this study allowed the CALL Steering Committee to identify marketing messages, the visual image of the campaign, and the specific types of media preferred by adults in the target populations.

The market research confirmed that *adults with some college, but no degree* were predominately female with a greater preference for 100% online course versus hybrid/blended courses or face-to-face courses, with 75% of respondents giving a high rating to accelerated courses to complete a program on an accelerated schedule. 54% of adults in this target group rated television advertisement, website of a college, internet search engines, mail to you at your home, and radio ads at 4 or 5 on 1 to 5 scale from least preferred to most preferred. 75% of respondents planned to re-enroll in college in the next 3 years and 70% of respondents want to study part-time. 57% would be working full-time and 30% of respondents would be working part-time while studying. All this information offers substantial insight on how to design courses, programs, and services to attract this market.

Adult Learning Campaigns

Bossier Parish Community College and Northwestern State University, armed with information from the both types of market research, embarked on the development of a region wide adult learning campaign. The campaign targeted adults with some college and no degree in a 13 parish area in Northwest Louisiana. The campaign included many elements discussed in this section and generated substantial results. Readers should not that results are broken down into two categories in order to demonstrate the full effect of an adult learning campaign on two different types of public institutions of higher education in Louisiana.

Fall 2007 - Overall Campus Impact

Institution	Inquiries	Applications	Enrollments (duplicated)	Students (nonduplicated)
BPCC	746	152	NA	116
NSU	687	227	464	147
Totals	1433	379	464	263

Fall 2007 - CALL Programs Specific Data

Institution	Applications	Enrollments (non-duplicated)	Students (non-duplicated)
BPCC	75	NA	63
NSU	227	284	89
Totals	302	284	152

The Southern Regional Education Board, a partner in the CALL initiative, had experience conducting *adult learning campaigns*, tracking these campaigns, and reporting on the results. Building on the current **Go Alliance** established among SREB states to share media messages and materials about access to higher education, SREB provided the CALL initiative and its partners access to a dual-purpose **Adult Learning Toolkit**. The toolkit provided “a how-to framework for building a media campaign, including message development and effective community outreach;” and connected CALL institutions “to a network of grassroots organizations currently working with adults and connect them to resources and services utilizing SREB’s expanded *Electronic Campus* Web site (www.electroniccampus.org)” (SREB, 2007).

The Message and Image. The CALL Steering Committee adopted a consistent message for all campaign elements - “Fast Track & Online – That’s How You Can Finish Your Degree.” Images of two mature adults from predominant ethnic backgrounds in the region and responsive to both genders were selected. Furthermore, the image of the graduate helped to reinforce the message. Some examples of campaign artifacts including an information card and billboard are provided below.

An example of an actual billboard posted on major interstates and highways in the region.



The graphic to the left is an example of a newspaper advertisement based on an information card for CALL.



Website Campaign. Adaptive Campus, one of the grassroots organizational affiliates of the **Go Alliance**, provided expertise and technical support in building a comprehensive student information web site, essentially the “destination” for adults reached by the various campaign efforts. This site, www.yourCALLla.org, served and continues to serve as a prospective students’ first exposure to detailed information on the CALL programs. The site has inquiry generation functions that are continuously improved by Adaptive Campus. The website proved very effective in generating email inquiries as well as phone calls to the designated numbers provided. Inquiries submitted through the website received customized auto-responder emails from each campus, Bossier

Parish Community College and Northwestern State University of Louisiana, directing the individual to institution specific sites. All website elements were developed based on the philosophy of **permission marketing** in which information on a prospective student

is gradually collected as the prospective student learns more about the educational opportunity and opts for more information. This philosophy helps produce a very low “bounce rate” or the number of visitors leaving the site after viewing the first page.

Adaptive Campus integrated a set of tools and reporting features through Google Analytics to track the visits to the site and analyze those visits. Real time access to the report features was provided to steering committee participants and provided feedback on what was working or not working in the campaign. Analysis of traffic at the website provided easy-to-understand reports on visitors - where they come from, how they use the site, what features converts them into inquiries, and additional related information. Google Analytics’ report functions include the ability to view reports in any timeframe, by geographic region, and based on user criteria, if user criteria are captured. The www.yourCALLla.org web site benefited from web site optimization techniques enabling a high ranking for the site when certain key words were queried in popular search engines.

Television Ads. Local television affiliate stations ran 483 30-second spots promoting CALL for adult learners, degree completion, and “fast-track” programming from June 1 to August 15 during morning and evening news times and during major events including: the NBA Finals, Grey’s Anatomy, the David Letterman Show, and the Tonight Show.

Radio Ads. 30 second radio spots were broadcast between 5 a.m. and midnight Saturday through Wednesday across rural areas of the 13 parish Northwest Louisiana region.

Billboard Ads. Although this item did not rate high in the marketing study conducted by the Aslanian Group, previous success with this form of marketing justified its use to communicate the CALL message and educational opportunities. 51 billboards along Interstate 49 and other highways in 9 parishes focused on grabbing attention quickly and getting adult learners to access the web site.

Newspaper Ads. This form of advertisement did not rate high in the market study; yet, one of the institutional partners had historical success with marketing in small-town papers. From June 1 to August 15, advertisements were printed in at least 11 weekly newspapers in rural area in the 13 parish region.

The Southern Regional Education Board provided approximately \$100,000 to pilot the direct marketing efforts discussed in this section.

Future Directions for Marketing to Adult Learners through CALL. Adaptive campus has been contracted with for a second year to add 4 new institutions to the www.yourCALLla.org website. Direct mail and poster campaigns are two of the low-cost, low-touch approaches being considered in year 2 of this ongoing statewide initiative. License for the Student Online Readiness Tool (SORT) was purchased from the University System of Georgia by the Louisiana Board of Regents to customize and to upload on the CALL website.

Summary

The early success of the pilot in reaching adult learners in the northern Louisiana region of the state has encouraged Louisiana leadership to expand the effort in 2007-2008. The Commissioner of Higher Education for the Louisiana Board of Regents has secured additional funds to add four institutions and several new programs to the partnership. These new institutions will have access to the resources and knowledge gained by all parties during the initial year of the pilot. In particular, they will have a “head start” on marketing efforts and the development of accelerated programs designed for adult learners.

The partnerships with SREB and its affiliates allowed Bossier Parish Community College and Northwestern State University access to a menu of resources. The two elements, Marketing Research and an Adult Learning Campaign based on that research, proved effective in generating inquiries, applicants, and enrollments.

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