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AUTHOR Kirkman, Kay
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ABSTRACT

Johnson County Community College, one of 20 institutions of higher education in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area, has developed a comprehensive communications program which works. Close to eight percent of the college's current operating budget is dedicated to the communication process. Most publications are printed on campus by the Word Production Service. The Media Production Section consists of a coordinator, a publications editor, a graphics supervisor, five graphics illustrators, a photographer, a typesetter, two TV producer/directors, and two TV engineers. Newspapers, cable television programs, radio broadcasts, flyers, brochures, catalogs, and other approaches are used to inform area residents about the college's offerings, to attract prospective students, to reach special groups (high school seniors, senior citizens, hearing-impaired, etc.), and to keep enrolled students informed of college affairs, placement services, counseling services, etc. The communications program and its costs and benefits are described.

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JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Does it sometimes seem that you are being bombarded with information? Sounds and sights that tell you more than you need or want to know? Welcome, then, to the quiet, selective world of communication at Johnson County Community College.

Here is a community college with beautiful new facilities, a wide variety of programs and an outstanding staff. There are the prospective students--inundated with information and inducements from other colleges, vocational and trade schools. The problem: how to get information from here to there. The solution: a well-planned communication program.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Then let's toss in a few complicating factors. JCCC is one of 20 institutions of higher education in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. The majority of the prospective students come from Johnson County and range in age from under 18 to over 80. They may enroll in a wide variety of credit, continuing education and community service activities. The college is located in a county with more than 239,000 residents and 21 separate, incorporated cities (14 of which have contiguous boundaries). The prospective students may receive their information from the large circulation, twice-daily metropolitan newspaper OR from one of the nine local county papers. They may watch the four commercial television stations OR the one public television station OR they may live in one of the more than 17,500 homes which are connected to cable television. OR they may listen to one of 23 area

radio stations. Top these complications with the fact that the college is only six years old and you've got communication headache #71.

JCCC'S COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

The college determined to overcome this headache with a planned program of communication. JCCC has a basic philosophy that everyone in the community is a student at the college. They may not be enrolled in a specific activity at this moment, but sooner or later the college will touch their life, for the community is the college.

The college made an early commitment to a top quality communication program. Close to 8% of the college's current operating budget is dedicated to the communication process.

A Media Production Section was established with a coordinator, publications editor, graphics supervisor, five graphic illustrators, photographer, typesetter, two television producer/directors and two television engineers. Graphic, photographic, audio and television production equipment are of the finest quality.

The Word Production Section of the college produces typed and printed reproductions. With the exception of the Viewbook and the college schedule, all printing is done in-house. Word Production has three sheet-fed offset presses, a collator, folder, cutter and other mechanical equipment necessary to maintain a printshop which is averaging over 600,000 impressions per month.

In order to avoid a deluge of ineffectual communications, the college devised a four-point communication program.

1. Acquaint the Community

Since JCCC was a new college with a concept for total education that was new to many people, it was important to acquaint the community with the college.

The public information officer developed close contacts with all the media people and produced a steady stream of informative, interesting news releases. The press were given special tours of the new campus and provided with any materials they requested. Public service announcements with current information went out on a regular basis and advertising was purchased from newspapers, radio and television through a program that was planned around a yearly advertising campaign. Radio stations with a large number of young listeners carried messages geared to them while paid ads were placed in local high school newspapers. Typical news releases provided prospective students with information on programs and the activities of current students, i.e., Jazz Lab Band, debate team, DECA, dental hygiene and nursing students. Over 100 articles now appear monthly in local newspapers.

The counseling staff worked closely with local high school counselors. JCCC counselors visit every high school in the area at least once a week. There is no waiting for information about the college, and the college learns immediately if there is a problem developing or a surge of interest in a specific program. This year, the college counselors have been invited to sit in with high school counselors and help students plan their programs from the 10th grade through a baccalaureate degree or beyond.

A Speakers' Bureau was inaugurated shortly after the college opened its doors, using staff members as well as community resource people. The

college offered speakers, entertainment and program planning free of charge to any group in the community. Staff members spoke on everything from demographic planning to winemaking to new roles for women. To promote this service, a Speakers' Bureau packet (1) was prepared by the college in the spring of 1973 and mailed to every service organization, church and school in the county. Prior to distribution, requests were averaging four per month. After distribution, requests jumped to 20 or more per month. Each speaker and program helped develop an awareness of JCCC, a new college with a new community concept.

JCCC began broadcasting over cable television in the fall of 1973. Currently, programs which are designed to inform and entertain are broadcast approximately 25 hours per week during the college's fall and spring terms. A weekly schedule is published in area papers. The majority of the shows are produced in the JCCC studios and include:

- Truckin' - performances by local and national musicians with commentary on instruments, music history and style
- Gallery (2) - interviews featuring area artists and museum personnel
- Gardening Guidance - county agent provides garden and landscape advice
- Coping with Inflation (3) - how to spend money wisely
- Whistlestop - interviews and debates featuring local and state office seekers

The telecable connection has been a valuable addition to the college's communication program.

As part of the program to acquaint the community with the college, a portable display unit was designed. Regular exhibits and displays were set up in area high schools, in shopping centers, at fairs or public meetings--almost anywhere a crowd could be found.

During the past year, a bimonthly community newsletter was begun. Mailed to more than 2,500 individuals, the newsletter offers an activity

calendar, information about upcoming programs and events as well as articles of general interest about the college.

Has this program of public awareness been effective? A survey conducted by the Office of Institutional Research in the spring of 1974 found that 98% of the respondents had heard of JCCC prior to being contacted for the survey.

2. Attract Prospective Students

While it is important for the community to be aware of the college's existence, it is a necessity for the college to have programs that will attract students. From the beginning, the college utilized advisory boards consisting of community members to design programs that would meet student and community needs. Input was sought from counselors, parents, students, business people and representatives from area four-year colleges and universities.

As the curriculum developed, college catalogs and a multitude of other publications were designed to present factual information to prospective students. There were flyers for foreign students, veterans, the hearing impaired; brochures describing advanced placement, GED, CLEP, student activities, financial aid, special continuing education or community service programs, on-site training, physical development facilities, etc. Each provided a segment of information which might be needed by a prospective student and, when used with discrimination, allowed individuals to find out precisely what they wanted to know.

This selective approach to communication has been expanded during the past year as the college broke its catalog into six components. Now the targeting process becomes even more exact.

The first two components were designed to attract prospective students by telling them about JCCC--what the philosophy, atmosphere, staff and student body were really like. These two publications are the Viewbook (4) and the Careers book (5).

Viewbook. Before work is begun on any major publication, a statement of its purpose and intended audience is written and approved.

This is the Viewbook statement:

The Viewbook should provide an image of the College. It should reflect the philosophy, atmosphere, community-orientation and openness of JCCC. After glancing through the Viewbook, the reader should have a "feeling" of what the College is all about. If the reader spends more time looking at the Viewbook, he should find some specific answers to questions about the College, even if the answer is simply who to contact for more information. The Viewbook should arouse enough interest that the reader will either contact the College personally, recommend the College to a friend or family member, or will remember JCCC favorably when he sees a news story, hears a speaker or is asked to vote for a board member or a bond issue.

The Viewbook should be aimed at three audiences: first, the prospective student who is interested in either credit or non-credit offerings and may be under 18 or more than 80 years of age; second, the community resident; third (and least important), other colleges and educators.

Thirty thousand of the Viewbooks have recently been delivered to the college. In order to assure a wise communication use of such materials, the publications editor met with counselors, admissions personnel and the college receptionist to discuss the most effective distribution of the Viewbook and other publications. The emphasis is always to provide prospective students with the specific information they need.

Careers Book. The Careers book was designed to attract prospective students to this particular area of the college curriculum. At first, each career area had a separate brochure but this did not give prospective students a total picture of the programs available. High school

counselors advised the college that it was inconvenient to keep track of numerous flyers and that students could easily miss a program which might interest them. Following these guidelines, the Careers book was developed. Over 13,000 have been distributed during the past year and they have become one of the most requested college publications. Career programs have increased from 14 to 18 with three more under consideration for this fall. Enrollment has increased from 225 students in 1969 to 814 in 1975.

Catalog/Course Descriptions. The Catalog/Course Descriptions book, to be completed in June, will provide prospective students with admissions requirements, registration procedures and course descriptions. It is intended for use by the student who has made the decision to attend JCCC.

Continuing Education/Community Services. The fourth component, to be completed in July, describes the continuing education/community services concept at JCCC. Over 6,000 people participated in continuing education and community service activities at the college in the spring of 1975, an increase of 1,500% from the program's inception in 1970. These students may be enrolled in educational workshops, courses or lectures; cultural or recreational activities; credit option courses or junior/senior and graduate level offerings. Specific communication with these prospective students is obviously an important facet of JCCC's communication program.

Continuing Education/Community Services Bulletin. A Continuing Education/Community Services Bulletin (6) is mailed to every residence in the county three times a year. The bulletin describes offerings including the time, location and fee. Mail-in registration blanks allow

a majority of the students to enroll without leaving their home. Since 65% of the activities are held off campus, continuing education/community service enrollees gain most of their knowledge about the college's programs from the bulletin. Careful attention to graphic design as well as utilization of an economical tabloid format has allowed the college to prepare, address and mail the bulletin for less than 14¢ each--far less than the cost of a single page, first-class letter. A series of ads which are run prior to the mailing of the bulletin have proven almost too successful: if the mail is delayed, the switchboard at the college can anticipate a flood of telephone inquiries.

Today, more than 82,000 bulletins are mailed three times a year including the credit course schedule, registration information, program highlights, community service information and even applications for admission. Enrollment in both credit and continuing education/community service activities has grown steadily. In a study conducted by the Office of Institutional Research, 52% of the respondents said that they had obtained information through the mail about the college. Even more important, 69% said that they liked to receive information about the college through the mail.

3. Reach Special Groups

The college recognizes the special needs of various community groups in its communication process. Specific information is channeled to them through individually designed programs.

Quick Step. The Quick Step program for high school seniors is a good example. JCCC provides an opportunity for students to earn college credit while still enrolled in high school. The program was developed

in cooperation with local school officials but had shown only limited success. In the spring of 1972, there were 32 students enrolled in Quick Step.

To publicize the program, a flyer was mailed in December 1972 to parents of local Shawnee Mission District high school seniors. Flyers were also sent to outlying high schools. Ads were run in all high school and local newspapers. A second flyer was mailed in January and radio ads were run on two radio stations with a high percentage of teenage listeners. Counselors from JCCC visited each of the high schools in the county to publicize the program.

In the spring of 1973 there were 68 students in the program. A study was conducted by the Office of Institutional Research which indicated that 62% had received a flyer in the mail, 16% heard a radio ad and 16% saw a newspaper ad about the program.

Counselors indicated that students who were juniors in high school should receive the Quick Step information in order to plan their senior schedule. Accordingly, the college designed an attractive, light-hearted flyer (7) to explain the Quick Step program and mailed it to the homes of juniors and seniors in all area high schools during the fall of 1974. This spring, over 120 students are enrolled in the program and high school counselors report a high interest evidenced by students planning their senior schedule.

Brown and Gold Club. Another example of communications to meet specific needs is the Brown and Gold Club, designed for county residents who are 60 years of age or older.

When the college decided to allow senior adults to enroll in courses and attend college-sponsored activities free of charge, a vehicle was

needed for communication. It seemed apparent that many senior adults never looked at college publications as they thought of the college as a place for 18 and 19 year olds.

JCCC contacted area senior citizen organizations and provided a flyer with a simple application blank attached. Speakers fanned out to local club meetings and in the spring 1974 bulletin a description of the club, plus an application blank, was highlighted. By June, more than 300 senior adults had joined the club which boasts it has no dues, no meetings and no officers—only benefits.

Today, 828 Brown and Gold Club members receive a monthly activities calendar and the bimonthly community newsletter. Throughout the college, senior adults are taking credit courses, attending continuing education and community service activities, watching basketball games or the jazz band, side by side with other JCCC students of all ages. They have become active participants in program planning, student activities and all phases of college life.

Hearing Impaired Program. A special group of prospective students at JCCC are the hearing impaired students. The Kansas School for the Deaf is located in Olathe, only a few miles from the college. A study by JCCC indicated a need for college education and vocational training for these students beyond the high school level.

The program at JCCC is designed to integrate students into a regular classroom situation with the help of interpreters, notetakers and phonic ear equipment when indicated. Special flyers (8) were designed for these students and the counselors travel to K.S.D. on a regular basis. Staff members have learned sign language and most college offices now have at least one individual who can communicate manually with the hearing

impaired student. The college provides interpreters for all major student activities--when the campus was dedicated, an interpreter stood beside U.S. Representative Larry Winn as he spoke and a student interpreter earlier signed "The Star Spangled Banner" for the crowd. At JCCC, the hearing impaired student is special, not different.

4. Keep the Channels Open

The last part of JCCC's communication program may be the most important. If the college's philosophy is to be realized, everyone in the community must be a prospective student. Thus the college maintains a strong communication program with current students, realizing that they are its prospects for the future.

The Student Handbook (9), the sixth component of the catalog, is given to each student upon enrollment. It answers the basic questions most new students ask. Updated each year, the Handbook has proven a popular resource book for JCCC students.

Closed circuit television allows a message channel to be shown continuously throughout the campus. Placement opportunities, new activities, programs of interest are constantly available in the halls and the College Commons. Cabletelevision is also useful in keeping students aware of what's going on at the college.

The journalism students prepare a section of a weekly county newspaper, giving them practical experience while helping the college communicate with county residents and current students. Posters (10), flyers, bulletin boards--all are a part of the college's communication system.

CONCLUSION.

Johnson County Community College is now the largest of the 19 community colleges in the State of Kansas and the third largest institution of higher education in the greater Kansas City area. Well aware that many institutions are experiencing declining enrollment, JCCC strives to implement its communication philosophy through selective, innovative, well-documented procedures. When a prospective student receives a flyer or a catalog, sees an advertisement or watches a television show, the college wants to communicate a sense of quiet, selective response to that particular student's need. If JCCC can do that, the communication program is a success.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

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