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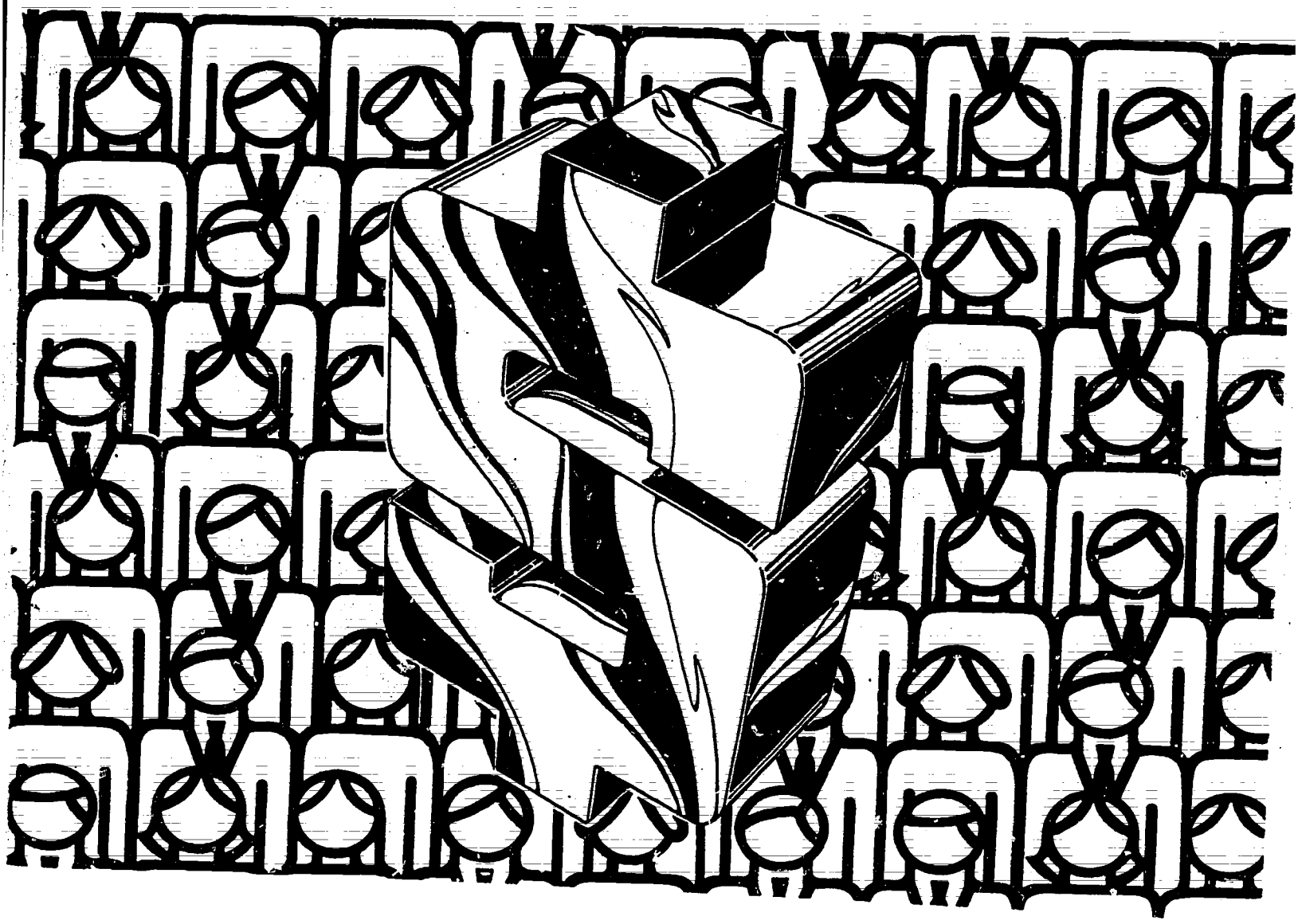
ABSTRACT

Social sciences in the community college are at a critical point in their history and development. Except for a few statistical aberrations, enrollment in the social sciences and humanities is declining significantly. The idea of marketing a segment of a college's or university's offerings, particularly when it is not tied to a particular problem program seems parochial and provincial at best and chauvinistic at worst. It has been assumed that the social sciences specifically and the humanities generally should be able to stand on their own. However, the attitudes toward learning today in general are at best ambivalent, and resistance to the idea that the humanities and social sciences are fundamental is stronger than it has ever been. Various marketing principles can be applied to these curriculum areas with the short-term objective of improving the image of liberal arts by being proactive and by establishing credibility. (BZ)



Marketing the Social Sciences Ethically

A Paper for Discussion
Community College Social Science Association
St. Louis, Missouri, March 19, 1987

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MARKETING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICALLY

We are at a critical point in the history and development of the social sciences in the community college. We are also at a critical point in the role of education in the United States. I did not come here to be alarmist, but I am frankly scared. From the broadest perspective possible; it should be clear by now that we are rolling downhill at an ever increasing speed toward possible world disaster, whether by nuclear, economic, or environmental means. The answers being put forward by our leaders, for the most part, seem to at best be only delaying tactics. In some cases, they seem to be adding more weight to whatever is rolling almost as though since the end of civilization as we know it appears to be inevitable, they might even want to speed up the process.

At the national level, the answer to national defense is more technology, the way of compensating for the death of seven astronauts is the development of better "O" rings, and a proposal to take care of catastrophic illness costs is to have older people pay more money in insurance to private companies.

Now what does all this have to do with marketing the social sciences, and ethically, at that? We don't have the students, and when we do, we are not doing all we can in our classes to make our students aware of the sword over their heads; and awareness is simply not enough.

There has been a great deal of talk about a resurrection (sorry if that offends), but it is almost as though the social sciences of the so-called liberal arts (What are the conservative arts?) were dead. In spite of recent articles in trade magazines (We call them educational journals.), the liberal arts are not experiencing a comeback (I didn't know they had retired like some NFL player.). Except for a few statistical aberrations, enrollment in the social sciences and the humanities is declining significantly, and we are not reaching enough people to literally put the right things in their heads. While psychology and economics enrollments are experiencing a slight increase; and some of the survey courses in the arts and humanities are almost respectable, the rest of us are looking out at smaller classes, fewer sections, and blank, if not hostile, student faces. The increase in enrollment in economics and psychology can be directly attributable to the increase in enrollment in business area majors and the increase in allied health career programs. In fact, the liberal arts are suffering not only major enrollment declines, but a major crisis of legitimacy.

The reasons for this are, first, because the answers humanities provided during the 60's turned out to be self serving. The solutions of the social problems of the times were merely make work for social scientists. Second, the movement away from the liberal arts was grounded in higher education's rejection of its mandate to educate the whole person. The decision to concentrate on occupational/career training was brought about partly by economics and demography, but partly by society's discontent with what happened on college and university campuses in the late 1960's and with what the colleges appeared to become in the 70's.

The truth of the situation is that business and technical programs are requiring more/some/little liberal arts in their curriculum because colleges, including community colleges, have a surplus of liberal arts faculty left over from the 60's (50's and 40's, too - we don't want to discriminate against the elderly). Because of tenure and the noise we make, the colleges can't get rid of us. But they would really like to, because we are too liberal (in most cases, pseudo liberal) in almost all parts of the country (Except Texas, they are strange down there, or California; there they are the conservatives - you can tell - they wear shoes.). The objections to social science teachers are not only in relation to politics, but just the reason we are there, i.e., we teach liberal arts; and therefore, the other parts of the career programs are constrained from expanding their courses. If you stop to think about it, when we complain about the need for more courses or credit hours because of the information explosion, how do you think they feel in nursing, electronic engineering, or accounting?

The other reason there is a blip in the social science enrollments is that there are more people in school who are required to take introduction to, fundamentals of, concepts of, or principles of...whatever. Where the liberal arts faculty are perceived as powerful (They really aren't; the others are just to busy to get involved.) in the college governance system, classes are of a moderate size. Where we act like wimps, we get treated like wimps. In order to teach advanced classes with small enrollments, we end up lecturing/preaching/shouting at aggregates the size and composition of an infantry battalion.

The technical and business program directors have been asked or required to keep and even expand the number of courses in the social sciences as an appendix (which is about to rupture) to their career programs. We supposedly don't want to turn out technocrats and bureaucrats who are bereft of "culture", human relations skills, and not knowing how to spend their leisure (talking psychology at a cocktail party). We have supposedly learned a hard lesson (What's a soft lesson?) after the overkill reaction to Sputnik, when our

science "egg heads" were found to be either hard boiled, soft, or scrambled, and had difficulty doing anything including the jobs for which they were trained because they were just trained and not educated. But we quickly forgot when the technologies became bureaucratized and the bureaucracies became technologized and higher education became the minimal requirements for any job.

We also negated any contribution the liberal arts could have made because of the 60's protests. For most people it was the liberal arts, particularly the social science people, who allegedly led the country to shame, not the people who were running things in Washington and Saigon. (NB: Remember some of the original professors in the community college were those who had been blackballed from the universities in the McCarthy era.).

Even with all the breastbeating and commission reports in the last few years, social change is generally viewed as its alleged concomitant, social conflict. Even before the yuppie phenomena, it was clear people want, in spite of what Dick Gregory said ("Teach me how to live, don't teach me how to make a living."), to know how to make a good living. They aren't in the least bit interested in learning how to live a good life. Everybody knows how to live well if they have enough money; the TV shows us how. With instantaneous culture on the idiot box, even for those pseudo liberals who only watch PBS and educational cable, why does anyone have to learn anything in the liberal arts, humanities, or social sciences in any detail whatsoever? We can buy knowledge in a cassette. [When we made fun of the blond furniture of the 50's, we only did so half heartedly, because it represented a new affluence and a shift from the collective to the individual; from savings to consumption; from looking at the past to looking towards the future.] While it would be nice to conclude that this generation looks to the future, if it does, it's a short future; and it's primarily related to dollars.

The attitudes toward learning today in general are at best ambivalent, but the resistance to learnings in the humanities is stronger than it ever has been. The practical liberal arts (those leading directly toward careers) are disparaged constantly, both in the type and content of their training and education and in what one could call the lack of efficacy in the applied arts and social science careers. From nursing to teaching and back to social work and from commercial art to law enforcement, the community at large views most of these not only less than professional, but less than most technical and business careers. In fact the only "career" listed above that cannot be accomplished with a so-called two year degree is public school education; and that's only because of the strength of the unions. That will probably change as the shortage becomes even more severe in the 90's

as that latest baby boomlet hits the schools. Even here, early childhood education, currently employs community college graduates, as opposed to high school graduates, because of state licensing laws. It is crystal clear that our society's education priorities and remuneration schedules for the careers in liberal arts are not commensurate with the training and responsibility involved in these careers.

The idea of marketing a segment of a college's or university's offerings, particularly when it is not tied to a particular problem program seems parochial and provincial at best and chauvinistic at worst. It has been assumed that the social sciences specifically and the humanities generally should be able to stand on their own. A professor is allowed to put up posters occasionally about a special course he/she wants to teach, but if it is overdone, this behavior is discouraged. Its alright to advertise Russian History but not an introductory survey course. Certainly sociology professors are not supposed to publicly say that taking their course will eliminate more zits than taking psychology courses which are known to increase anxiety. (Sophomore psychology students are subjects - sophomore sociology students are researchers.)

As I've indicated, the idea of marketing our own courses seems minimally plebeian, and to many, repugnant. The reasons are complex, but part is that we associate marketing with only advertising. The other aspects of marketing may be more appealing and may not.

Why should we market ourselves, which is really what we mean, and if it is a dog-eat-dog world in the halls of academe, once we've decided we should, why ethically? First, why should we prostitute ourselves like the proprietary schools do? The answer is very simple. We are what makes a college an institution (in the sociological sense) of higher education (emphasis being on education). We will have to live with these people in the same society after they leave our hallowed halls. Whether he/she becomes a nurse, a bridge builder, a fast food emporium manager, a laboratory technician, or a travel agent, we want, when our paths cross again, more than a technician minimally trained. We don't want to support through public welfare a person whose job has been eliminated through automation and who can't retrain. We want to be treated as human beings, not simply a paying customer or an incidental to their getting their job done and getting paid. Second, we have an obligation to "sell the product" in a manner that instills and retains confidence. The students must believe and then know that the courses that they are taking or have taken are important and actually will make them better people, help them in their careers, and positively impact other people, the man-made and natural environment.

The issue of "our pushing our thing" ethically is more important than we can imagine. While there may be a sucker born every minute, as Barnum was alleged to have said; we don't really want people leaving our classrooms perceiving themselves as not having gotten their money's worth. False promises lead to false expectations which in today's world leads to grievances, malpractice suits and bad reputations.

Promotion, of the self, initially reminds one of prostitution or procurement. But if we are honest with ourselves, we wouldn't have the jobs we have without a lot of self-promotion. There is nothing wrong with it. Putting together a favorable resume isn't different than offering/agreeing to give guest lectures in colleague's classes, serving as a debate advisor, running a lending library, actually donating those freebee books you got from publishers to the library, writing for the school newspaper, appearing on local talk shows, speaking at Kiwanis, Rotary or Parents Without Partners meetings.

We also don't want to be perceived as salespersons for a product. That's beneath us. We would like to believe that we are so dynamic, students will flock to our classrooms and our subject is so interesting and important, they would suffer any adversity to learn it. Question: "Who are we kidding"? Answer: "Ourselves". We also believe that whatever public relations, advertising, or even marketing that is going on at our college, that we could do it better.

I would not be so presumptuous as to tell you how to teach your subject, but teaching today competes with General Hospital, The Young and Restless, Cosby, Jeopardy, Merv and the Six O'Clock News. While we might denigrate them (If we do it in our classrooms, we better have a good reason for doing it.), we must understand they are more of a competition than the other courses at our college. Every tire we knock the media in general without justification and without providing an alternative, we become in the eyes of our students like the parents who said masturbation will give you warts. Either we become the object of fear or the object of ridicule.

I am not contending that we ought to try to compete on their terms, but we must compete. We must be topical, but not faddish. We must understand attention span (but not give in). We must orient ourselves to our students and the process of learning, rather than our subjects and the act of teaching. We must become acclimated to accommodating different cognitive styles, including right brain, left brain differences and more. Do we have to do this? "You bet your Booties, we do."

One of the strong points is the humanities and social

sciences' interdisciplinary and application nature; the latter first. While college students today are very career oriented, they do have a sense of whatever they plan on doing's social/cultural value. Even the ardent incipient accountant or potential EE wants to know and believe that what he/she will be doing has some enduring value, social purpose, or minimally won't hurt the environment too much. It is important to stress this aspect by
1. knowing and using examples from areas the students are studying, For example,

nursing - a perfect area for integrating human relations, communications, cross-cultural data. (Remember holistic medicine came from Anthropology.);

civil engineering - O.D. zones, displacement, sound buffers, aesthetics, invasion/succession

accounting - leisure, interactional skills; and with the current rash of scandals, ethics,

2. It is definitely worthwhile for the student of whatever to know the social/cultural history of that particular whatever. Students can better understand the premise of their area, and by understanding where it came from, better understand where it is going.

3. Incorporating trend analysis into all subject matter. Knowledge is by its nature de facto and post hoc. Because the sense of insecurity in today's world has been shown to be profound, students want to know how to know where they're going.

4. Talk to your colleagues who teach those other subjects. They really are not a different species. Talk to the counselors. Get referrals. Arrange for them to be speakers in your classes. Read their texts, at least the introductory ones, minimally to understand and hopefully to incorporate some examples and their logic into what you are teaching. You might even break down and eat lunch with them, but I really don't expect you to go drinking with them.

For example, the set-up of a balance sheet in accounting can be used as a way of analyzing the arguments of the federalist, the antifederalists, and those arguing for re-association with England.

The interdisciplinary aspect is harder to market, both to the faculty and to the students. For a long time, in fact since the introduction of the Carnegie unit, subject matter has been discreted into separate disciplines and only for a short period of knee jerk liberalism in the late sixties, did schools attempt anything like interdisciplinary teaching. The major problems were that hardly anyone was taught how to

do it, and no one was taught how to learn to integrate knowledges. Little or no planning had been done about what should be put together; and virtually no research or evaluation about effectiveness or efficiency of anything had been completed. The only residual was the Black Studies and Women's Programs, where they still exist and some new or reconfigured courses.

The concerns of students relative to the form, type, extent, and manner of performance assessment and evaluation may have something to do with the enrollment trends in the social sciences and humanities. While we discuss content elsewhere in this paper, it is also relevant here for it would be logical to assume that the content of material generally directs the evaluation of students; after all, form is supposed to follow function. But there are several intervening variables.

First, as we've also discussed, social science and humanities class sections tend to be larger than most others. Enrollments, because of general education requirements for a variety of reasons are large; and the courses, except for an occasional upper division level seminar, are taught in lecture format. And, the larger the lecture, the better! Large lectures, especially with computer graded testing capabilities, dictate multiple choice and true/false tests. These tests more often than not consist of questions taken at random from a test bank supplied by the publisher, often "written" by a former student of the textbook author, graduate assistant or some young assistant professor who needs to make a few extra bucks. These tests are generally of the recall variety, principally at the identification level.

Review of these tests and student comments, often vociferous, indicate that they are generally not adequate, let alone good measure of student knowledges or learnings. In fact, a "form B" of a test administered only one class session after a "form A" was personally administered showed no consistent intercorrelation. The only not surprising result was a 15% drop-off in scores.

Attitudes toward testing are inter-related to attitude toward content, thus students who would have trouble with concretizing amorphous material would feel negative toward the amorphous material of the social sciences. Even short answer essay type questions have very specific answers.

The discussion format in small classes is clearly a phenomenon of the larger budgets and different philosophies of the past. In fact to "balance out" the budget with classes that "must" be taught in small groups (the rationale for small science labs still escapes me - if the issue is

only direct supervision by preceptors or lab assistants -are there not economies of scale? - but that's another issue.). The point here is that the amorphous material of the humanities and social science is better suited to the small class format. That's what we have to get in order to do our job well.

Now, what is there about the content of the liberal arts/general educations/arts and humanities that currently appears to have an appeal? The answer is everything on the three sides of the slashes ("/") in combination. What educators say employers say they want (beyond over-credentialed personnel - note I didn't say over-qualified) is more ability to think, discuss, generalize, abstract, and synthesize. What people, particularly older students, realize and want is something beyond training for specific employment. One of the few things we have learned from the megatrends of the third wave is that specialization leads to a roller coaster ride not only "career - wise", but "life - wise" also. In fact, it has been demcnstrated that people with liberal arts backgrounds are better able to adapt to change then people without such education. And, what society appears to be acknowledging is technology without the arts and humanities makes not only Jack a very dull boy, buy may be the reason why Jack can't read. Now to the marketing.

In marketing, there are two areas of follow-up which are essential. First a potential student who has been approached, but has not bought the "product" should be encouraged further, but not with a hard sell. Give 'em a taste:

-Biographies of famous people in the sciences, technologies, and business who started out in social science.

-Examples of social science literature which has changed other fields, preferably written by famous people, e.g., Nobel, Einstein, Schweitzer, or Bronowski.

-Demonstration of a technological breakthrough, e.g., computer art, holography, laser discs showing almost anything with real people that relates directly to the subject matter of the social sciences or humanities.

-Cutsy items: facts brochures, cardboard rulers, book marks that clearly identify or relate to the social science department or division.

-Film fests: movies that demonstrate and relate: Dr. Strangelove, Soylent Green, with speakers before and after.

The other time follow-up is essential is after a student has taken a first course. "Cooling the mark out" as Howard Becker would describe it, far from being unethical is the most important part of retention. The new term in education is "student persistence", but a student will not even think of persisting unless he is made to feel personally important.

Students must be fully informed as to the course content, the manner of instruction, and anything that will help him do well. We must be diligent that we do not misrepresent, either intentionally or unintentionally. Our courses, and we, personally are limited as to efficacy. We don't have all the answers and we should not profess that we do. We must evaluate student achievement promptly, equitably, and appropriately. Our accountability must be total. Student feedback not only has to be incorporated into future deliveries, but the student him or herself that has a legitimate complaint must be satisfied. He or she must be compensated in some real way for our inadequacies. Allowing him to retake the course without paying is minimally required.

There needs to be direct instructor involvement with the student beyond classroom instruction. Faculty advising provides the one-on-one contact most students say makes the difference in their continued enrollment in an area. NB: Make sure you have something solid to offer them that they can use, that is transferable to a four-year program, and that isn't just another course you teach. It may be necessary to up-date curriculum, not simply add courses.

Student evaluations of the courses and instructors need to be on-going cybernetic processes. In order to do this, we must make sure our evaluations of students actually do what they are designed to do, i.e., provide feedback to the student and teacher about learnings and nonlearnings. But even before that, we must design our courses in a manner that maximizes student learning of content and process. We must continuously ask ourselves: if we were the students and not the least bit interested, what would we want the course, lecture, activity to be like. This does mean that we should not have rigor, nor that we should not teach what interests us (that's almost always positively contagious). We should though be guided by the principle of educational sense; i.e., is it worthwhile, is it generalizable, and can the learning be transferred to new and unique problems.

The issue of price is obviously crucial in marketing, but we rarely have any say so in pricing our product; and I'm not sure we should, even if we could. But there are ways of influencing the perception of price by our potential students. First, by setting up our courses so that they are integrated with classes in other areas, we can achieve, if not a "two for one", at least a bargain. For example, working out the assignments for a Social Problems class and an English class that requires research papers so that the student can hand in the same paper for both classes. Not only are you going to get a better written paper, but because the students have you as a resource, their papers for English won't be as boring for the English teacher to read. Thus too, Political Science can dovetail with Public Speaking.

Interpersonal Communications can be linked to Social Psychology and mathematics courses go well with Economics classes. The possibilities are endless. A spin-off of this type of inter-relationships is the potential of increasing the transfer of learning.

Another way of influencing perception of price is by having classes that normally are 11 or 13 weeks long during an intersession that is only four or six weeks long. While maintaining contact hours and quality of instruction, this type of massed process has often been successful in allowing the instructor to develop concepts more fully in class sessions of longer duration. Consortia sharing of telecourses, inter-campus microwave teleteaching can have economies of scale. These suggestions are not for all schools or all instructors, but they can work without sacrificing quality.

Another important way of influencing price is by the choice of texts, and how we choose them. We need not get complimentary copies of every new book that comes out. We need to go on record as objecting to the high price of texts. If there are three of you teaching a course, get one copy and share it. We should also choose material that the students have to purchase at least partially based on cost. Supplements are often superfluous. If you want students to read more, then donate to, or at least put your personal copies on reserve in, the library.

Distribution (place) is an important marketing concept. Scheduling is most germane to place. Courses should be scheduled so that they fit into the students' other areas of study. If the time is not convenient, they will not choose the liberal arts electives. Another area of concern is that often the older student is the student most interested in taking the liberal arts courses because they have been out in the "real world" and have discovered the practical and aesthetic values of such courses. These students take courses that are offered in the evenings and weekends. Often they are more likely to take courses offered at sites near their homes. It is useful to consider teaching some of these courses at off-campus public facilities. Another method of reaching these students is by telecourses. With at least a third of the population owning VCRs, this is a most convenient way to service people who do not have the time or inclination to travel to a site.

Students who attend colleges and universities out of the city are often amenable to picking up credits during the summer in their home towns. This might be an ideal time to schedule required liberal arts courses as well as those courses that students might consider fun but do not have time to take during the course of the year. If this group is to be addressed, it is important to get the summer schedule out

before Winter break and to these students so that they can plan for and register for summer courses. Along with this group of students are those high school students wishing to take Escrow courses especially during the summer. These students have not yet become jaundiced toward courses that they perceive do not help them earn a good living.

I note also the other speaker, who is talking on the "first class session". With drop and add, that first session is crucial for marketing. What we do in the first session, how honest we are, how enthusiastic we are, how clearly we state our expectations and how we describe what we and they are going to do during the course (and how we stick to it) is crucial. The syllabus should be as complete as possible; it should look good. In fact, one might go to the extra expense of putting it together with an illustrated cover with a recent relevant article or two from the newspaper. I often include my personal resume with at least a partial bibliography of what I've written on the subject. I audio and sometimes video tape the first session for students who missed it or who need that extra once-over. Especially with freshmen in Fall, I tell them where the bathrooms are on that floor, where the bookstore is and when is the best time to go there and exactly where my office is and when I'm there. I also try to get them actively into the subject by verbalizing their presuppositions as to content and interests. If it is a required course, I acknowledge that. The best form of recruitment is retention. If you can't keep them past the first session, you've lost the best segment of the market available. Again, remember the issue of honesty. Don't tell them its a gut course if it's not, but don't try to scare them away either. Once again, enthusiasm is a key element.

The short-term objective of marketing the liberal arts is improving the image of liberal arts by being proactive, by establishing our courses' credibility and our own credibility with the college community. Our courses must be relevant, topical, and interesting, not only for the students' chosen fields of study, but for their ability to adjust to and manage change in a volatile society. During the short-range, we will not expect a significant increase in enrollments. This will only come after the students first recognize and then spread the work that their liberal arts courses have indeed contributed to the quality of their lives.

Be a specialist and share your specialty. At the universities we went to, there were specialists and aside from those of us who had to write certain dissertations, we learned often by osmosis from the enthusiasm that a specialist has.

One final issue here. Don't let your personal or professional conflicts with other members of the college community get into the classroom. If you are having problems

with your chairman or a secretary, the students shouldn't be involved. Don't "knock" the school or the personalities of political leaders, but to deal with policies and programs and direct students toward well thought out social participation.

The marketing of a specific educational service is a function of relationship management. To quote Theodore Leavitt, What has to be marketed and ultimately sold is not the courses themselves (the product) but what the courses will give them (the augmented product). Students will take courses that enhance their productivity, help them grow and give them immediate and long term satisfaction.