

Research Findings – Part II



Part II Effective College Recruitment Strategies

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Despite recruitment efforts, a San Antonio community college was experiencing a marked decrease in Latino enrollment, particularly from neighborhood high schools that traditionally had been their feeder schools. The Intercultural Development Research Association examined the problem and found that the college, like many two- and four-year institutions, was faced with high attrition rates in high schools, competition among colleges and universities for a smaller pool of students, and shifting demographics. This article identifies the factors contributing to this phenomenon and reinforces the need for colleges and universities to work with K-12 schools to support student achievement throughout the K-16 system.

IDRA recently completed research to identify effective strategies for recruiting Hispanic and low-income students to enroll in San Antonio College. Funded through the duPont Foundation, San Antonio College (SAC) commissioned IDRA to identify best practices for recruiting Hispanic and low-income students. The findings are informing strategies that the college will use to improve its recruitment of Hispanic, low-income students.

This is the second in a series of three articles in the IDRA Newsletter presenting the results of this research study, with SAC's permission.



The first level of data review and analysis focused on identifying the enrollment patterns at SAC. An assessment of the geographic distribution of 18- and 19-year-old SAC students provided a geographic and demographic profile of enrollment patterns.

SAC's Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department provided the fall 2002 enrollment data as well as three years of its fact books containing profile data of students and faculty. IDRA also accessed high school data from our own databases and the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) in order to analyze the potential post-secondary education impacts of key variables at the feeder high schools.

Variables included number of high school graduates, number enrolling in the college track curriculum, and trend data over nine years on the number of graduates from selected feeder high schools. In addition, IDRA requested Alamo Community College District campus-specific data in order to assess whether changes in competing institutions' enrollment is contributing to changes in SAC enrollment trends.

IDRA also engaged in conversations with project staff focusing on their assessment of college attendance trends in feeder high schools as a way of triangulating data from multiple sources.



One of the key findings was that the major target feeder high schools have very high attrition rates (students enrolled in the ninth grade who are no longer present three years later). According to IDRA's research on school holding power, most of these schools suffer from a 30 percent to 50 percent attrition rate.

The loss of one third to one half of prospective graduates significantly reduces the number of

students from the target high schools who might have been recruited for college enrollment. These attrition rates have been persistent over time: only two of the six targeted high schools show even a minimal increase in the number of graduates over a nine-year span. Unless such trends are reversed, it may be difficult for SAC to increase its enrollment from these schools.

A second factor impacting college enrollment is the extent that students have access to and enroll in college preparation curriculum. Enrollment in college preparatory curriculum was relatively limited. And there were no substantive increases until 2001, the year the state announced its intention to have the recommended program become the default program for students.

A projected increase in the number of students enrolled in the college-track curriculum may help improve the prospects for increasing the number of students from target high schools who ultimately enroll at SAC.



Data analyses also suggest that increasing numbers of students enrolling at SAC reside in the city's northeastern and northwestern quadrants. This is a shift in the enrollment trends experienced in prior decades when greater percentages of the college enrollment were drawn from the western, southern and eastern sectors of the city. The new trend however, is reflective of a broader city trend of expanding population growth in some sectors, coupled with either population stagnation or decline in the others.

This would suggest that the decreasing proportion of students enrolling at SAC from westside, southside and eastside schools may be due, in part, to a proportionally stagnant or smaller graduation pool at these historical feeder high schools.

A more important factor, however, may be the overall shift in city population, a factor that will continue to impact SAC's enrollment profile. This is a development that the college may not be able to alter, even with increased recruitment in targeted feeder high schools.

One confounder in the high school feeder counts was the inclusion of dual credit enrollees from the Northside Independent School District (ISD) and the Northeast ISD that may be inflating the enrollment figures for these northwest and northeast sectors. IDRA was unable to secure additional data from SAC that disaggregates dual credit students from the general student enrollment population. Further analyses are recommended to discern the extent to which dual enrollment may be inflating enrollment profiles.

IDRA analyses did include enrollment by age range. Preliminary data analyzed suggest that only a quarter of the fall 2002 enrollees were between the ages of 16 and 19 years old. Twenty- to 39-year-olds comprise two-thirds of the fall 2002 enrollees. These data suggest that the college may be more successful in recruiting and retaining older individuals who return to school after spending time in the local workforce.

This high concentration of older students, however, may contribute to a perception by some high school students that SAC is an institution that focuses on serving older populations. The 16- to 19-year-old percentage may be even smaller, given that the dual credit students are still included in the total. Prospective interviews with current SAC and high school students may provide some insights on these issues and what the college may be able to do to address such perceptions, if they indeed exist.

Given changing demographics within San Antonio, limited enrollment pools in the targeted feeder high schools and increased competition from other community colleges and the University of Texas at San Antonio Downtown Campus, the decline from the targeted older feeder high schools should be expected. These trends will persist unless new strategies are developed in specific areas, including:

- increasing the high school graduation rate,
- increasing the number of students enrolled in college-track courses,
- creating a unique niche that distinguishes SAC from the other community colleges and four-year universities, and
- re-assessing recruitment efforts in light of new competitors and changing demographics.



SAC recruitment efforts are integrated into a larger management structure that focuses not only on incoming students, but an array of student subgroups. These include currently-enrolled students, transfer students, former students, continuing education students and first time (new) enrolling students.



SAC has engaged in various efforts to expand its minority student population, and particularly its Hispanic enrollment, over the years. In addition to collaborating with Project STAY (a San Antonio-based TRIO program that works with students to help them get into college), SAC staff have also established good working relationships with the San Antonio Education Partnership. The TRIO program is a federally-funded educational outreach program targeting low-income, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities to succeed from middle school through graduate school. The program guarantees that students graduating from 10 participating area high schools with a B average and a 90 percent attendance rate automatically qualify for scholarships to help offset some college-related costs. Between the two programs, SAC enrolls an estimated 1,300 pupils per year, mostly low-income and Hispanic students.

The college has also created positive working relationships with the San Antonio Pre-Freshman Engineering Program (PREP). This is a citywide effort that provides middle and high school students an opportunity to experience summer math and science classes in a college campus setting. With annual summer enrollment of more than 1,000 pupils, many of whom are high school seniors, the PREP program provides SAC an ideal group from which to recruit prospective students.

Though useful as “feeder” programs, these efforts do not recruit students specifically for enrollment at SAC. Recognizing the need for more targeted recruitment efforts, the college has created its own internal recruitment efforts.



SAC has created and funded or acquired external funding for developing and implementing its own student recruitment efforts. Since 1999, SAC has operated its own College Access Project designed to recruit students specifically for enrollment at SAC.

The project includes having a team of SAC counselors who visit area high schools to advise students of opportunities available at the college. Students can participate in off campus

registration and school-based college assessments needed to help guide them in course placement discussions.

About 40 local high schools currently are targeted by the College Access Project, including all eight San Antonio ISD campuses. The project for high school seniors recruited 325 pupils from San Antonio-area schools in 1999. In 2000, the project outreached to more than 9,254 students, and 535 of those students enrolled at SAC. By design, existing outreach efforts focus on specific school and zip code areas, concentrating the potential impact to targeted schools.

The college also operates the College Access Project for Corporate World Business. The effort employs a SAC counselor to work with local corporations and business groups who have in-house employee tuition assistance programs or other options that encourage employees to continue or expand their education. Using the SAC mobile team, this effort provides comprehensive on-site support for working students who want to pursue further training or post-secondary degrees.

SAC sponsors the Young Women's/Young Men's Conference, which brings 500 high school juniors and seniors together at the college campus for a conference. The one-day event provides local youth experiences that "promote regular class attendance in school, encourage academic productivity, and encourage them to consider higher education."

Prior to 1999, San Antonio ISD graduates could not attend SAC summer school classes because graduation dates occurred after the start of the SAC summer session began. To deal with the problem, SAC designed and established a summer senior program. This is a series of classes with start dates designed for San Antonio ISD graduates. This simple change resulted in a 168 percent increase in San Antonio ISD graduates' enrollment at SAC in the summer of 1999 and continues to pay dividends for both San Antonio ISD students and SAC.

SAC offers a specialized recruitment program targeting students pursuing health-related careers. The Summer Enrichment Program - Center for Health Policy Development provides 60 low-income high school students a summer bridge program that encourages them to consider or pursue a career in a health-related field, earn college semester credit hours, receive comprehensive student support services and assistance in planning and preparing for subsequent fall semester enrollment.

Documents produced by the college also describe two distinct special population group recruitment efforts. The first focuses on work with community-based organizations that encourage their constituencies to pursue education after high school. Using the resources available from the SAC mobile team, this effort includes providing on-site services to individuals at the community-based organization sites.

A second special population recruitment effort involves individuals with special needs. SAC collaborates with such agencies as the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, State Commission for the Blind, and San Antonio Independent Living Services. Other special population outreach efforts include veterans and eligible dependents, and students enrolled in Distance Learning efforts.

Another specialized student recruitment initiative is known as JETL and incorporates the first letters of the four area high schools (Jefferson, Edison, Fox Tech, and Lanier) that are specific targets. The JETL effort is focused on creating strong connections between selected SAC staff members and high school personnel, particularly the principals and counselors. The JETL effort

is a more recent SAC initiative, but some data suggest an increased awareness of SAC as a post-secondary option at these schools.



Though there are other efforts in place at SAC that are designed to support minority and special needs student enrollments, many are focused on supporting students already enrolled or in the process of enrolling at the institution. A review of the SAC enrollment management flowchart reveals the array of efforts being implemented to support students already enrolled in the system.

Compounding recruitment efforts are the realities that SAC is one of numerous campuses competing for a limited student pool. In contrast to past decades when SAC was one of two community college options - with no public university within 100 miles - San Antonio now boasts four private universities (St. Mary’s University, Our Lady of the Lake University, University of the Incarnate Word, and Trinity University); a major fast-growing state-funded college with a suburban and central city campus (University of Texas at San Antonio); four community college campuses (SAC, St. Philips College, Palo Alto College and Northwest Vista College); and recent incursions from the Texas A&M system.

The expanded number of options may well be impacting SAC enrollment patterns, though at least some of these institutions have been in existence for decades. There are increasing numbers of minority students, specifically Hispanic students who tend to enroll in two-year institutions. This suggests that even with greater competition, SAC could be maintaining if not increasing its Hispanic enrollments.

The high attrition rate from feeder high schools and shifting demographics are not unique to SAC. These phenomena are common to many two-year and four-year institutions and should serve to inform recruitment and retention efforts.

One additional source of information, and perhaps the most important source, are the clients (current and prospective) themselves. The next installment in this series will provide key information from interviews with high school students, college students and educators. It will shed light on what SAC and other colleges can do to ensure that all students have access and success in post-secondary education.

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The most recent trend data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that gaps between groups of students are still wide.			
	African American	Latino	White

Reading at Age 17 - NAEP 1996			
Learn from specialized reading materials	2%	2%	8%
Understand complicated information	16	18	37
Interrelate ideas and make generalizations	49	44	42
Show partially developed skills and understanding	28	30	12
Writing at Grade 11 - NAEP 1996			
Effective, coherent writing	1%*	1%	3%
Complete, sufficient writing	16	18	34
Beginning focused, clear writing	53	51	51
Incomplete, vague writing	28	28	12
Mathematics at Age 17 - NAEP 1996			
Multistep problem solving and algebra	1%	2%*	9%
Moderately complex procedures and reasoning	30	38	60
Numerical operations and beginning problem solving	60	52	30
Beginning skills and understanding	9	8	1
*interpret with caution			
Source: NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress, U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, NCES 97-985, Washington, D.C., September			

	Arkansas	Florida	New Mexico	New York	North Carolina	Texas
Completion grade (composite grade, based on the four measures immediately below)	D+	B+	D-	A-	B+	D+
Percent of first-year community college students who return for a second year	54%	61%	52%	62%	52%	41%
Percent of freshmen at four-year institutions who	67%	80%	69%	78%	80%	73%

return for a second year						
Percent of first-time full-time undergraduates who complete a bachelor's degree within five years	32%	52%	30%	53%	56%	43%
Number of certificates, degrees, and diplomas awarded per 100 undergraduate students	15	18	12	19	19	14
Public community college enrollments as a percent of total post-secondary enrollments	38%	55%	55%	29%	43%	51%
Number of enrollments in public community colleges	38,997	320,710	51,674	241,502	143,006	432,362
State grant aid targeted to low-income families as a percent of Pell Grant aid	21%	10%	10%	92%	26%	13%
Expected percent change in number of high school graduates by 2010 (compared with 1999)	-2.1%	26.4%	5.1%	9.1%	20.1%	11.7%
Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000.						

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