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# Public relations 'tech'niques: vocational school recruitment

Rachel Graeff

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**PUBLIC RELATIONS ‘TECH’NIQUES:  
VOCATIONAL SCHOOL RECRUITMENT**

by  
Rachel E. Graeff

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Communication  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts  
of  
Rowan University  
(May 20, 2012)

Master’s Thesis Chair: Suzanne FitzGerald



## **ABSTRACT**

Rachel Graeff  
PUBLIC RELATION'S 'TECH'NIQUES:  
VOCATIONAL SCHOOL RECRUITMENT  
2011/12  
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Master's of Arts in Public Relations

The problem is that the large majority of high school graduates pursue four-year college degrees when there are not enough professional jobs that require four-year degrees but rather require workers to have job-specific skills. These skills are taught by vocational schools at both the high school and the post-secondary levels.

The purpose of this study was to determine what public relations techniques vocational schools use and how they can improve on these techniques to increase enrollment.

Six in-depth interviews were conducted with PR/marketing practitioners at vocational schools to find out what techniques and channels their school uses to attract students. Practitioners were also asked about trends in enrollment, why they believe students do not attend vocational schools and what they believe are factors that affect enrollment.

Additionally, this researcher conducted 120 student intercept survey to determine how satisfied students are with particular aspects of their school. Students were also asked to give two recommendations to better their school and list the two best aspects of their school.

Research determined the majority of vocational students were satisfied with their school and would recommend it to others. Students listed the quality of education and teachers as the best aspects of their school. The majority of students heard about their school through word-of-mouth, from family and friends, teachers or school counselors.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### Problem Statement

Decades ago, America earned the reputation of being a blue-collar country built on grit and hard work. People woke up early in the morning, worked all afternoon and came home dirty after a long day's work. Men were farmers, mechanics or miners while women worked in the home or in factories. The overwhelming majority of American workers earned a living by completing physical labor, however, today that is far from the norm. Technological advances no longer require many jobs to be completed through manual labor.

Technological advancements caused a drastic shift in the work force from labor-intensive jobs to desk-friendly jobs. People stopped working with their hands and started working on computers. More people started working in offices, specifically in the professional field, while fewer people remained in blue-collar jobs.

Recently, the United States has experienced the repercussions of having so many people seek professional jobs. There are not enough professional jobs to support the mass amount of the population seeking these positions. Today, thousands of college graduates struggle to find work because there just are not enough jobs that exist requiring a four-year degree. Instead thousands of vocational jobs go unfilled and only require skill-specific learning.

The problem is that this educational trend does not match society's needs. The United States has too many students attending four-year college degrees when what it needs is people with skills. Society needs more people to pursue vocational work to sustain the

workforce. Few students pursue vocational education while more individuals enroll in traditional education causing an unbalanced system.

To re-balance America's education system, vocational schools need to determine why students are not enrolling in vocational education and use specific public relations techniques to attract more students into its programs.

Many factors could contribute to the decrease in students pursuing vocational work. One possible explanation is the change in the educational system. In the 1970s, students had more control over what they learned in high school. They could choose to either learn all academics or learn a mix of academic and vocational skills. Today, the number of students who take an all academic learning is overwhelming and few students enter vocational programs. Students are often not even aware of vocational opportunities and therefore students are not interested in the programs that are offered (Pucel, 1998).

Barack Obama believes the United States education system has strayed from its original mission saying that the U.S. education system's "goal isn't just to make sure that somebody has got a certificate or a diploma. The goal is to make sure your degree helps you get a promotion or a raise or a job," (Goldstein, 2011).

Not every student will benefit from learning strictly academics. The job market is plentiful for vocational students with the right skill-set and academic-specific knowledge. These students will benefit from hands-on learning that teaches job-specific skills.

Low vocational school enrollment may be due to the negative reputation that vocational schools receive as being a school for the "dumb kids." Vocational schools are often portrayed as a place for students who cannot succeed in college-level classes. This causes vocational education to receive a "second-class education," (Murray, 2007).

Mike Rowe, from *Discovery Channel's* popular show *Dirty Jobs*, worked hundreds of blue-collar jobs (Steven Samaniego, 2011). Every week his show explores different American “dirty” job. The jobs are not glamorous or prestigious but in an economic recession, few have the option of being picky. After years of exploring blue-collar, vocational work began his own PR campaign to end the negative connotation of “dirty jobs.” In an interview with Steven Samaniego (2011) Mike Rowe states:

Fifty years ago, college needed a PR campaign and it got one -- it got a good one. But like so many of those attempts, in our effort to build up the value of a college education, we've very quietly marginalized all other forms of knowledge (paragraph 21)

Vocational schools' declining enrollment might also be due to individuals believing that college is the only way to make a stable living. Individuals see a college degree leading to dollar signs. Nancy Perry, executive director of the American School Counselor Association in Alexandria, VA, says convincing students and parents to consider trade work is difficult because everyone wants to go to college (Stamps 1998). She explains that even parents who work in the trades themselves and enjoy steady work and good benefits want their children to go to college.

Multiple factors contribute to the declining number of individuals who pursue vocational work. This author believes that if vocational schools educate parents and students about the opportunities that vocational schools offer, more students would enroll in vocational schools.

## Hypothesis

**H1: It is expected if vocational schools use certain public relations techniques, more students would attend vocational school programs.**

Huang, Wang and Tau (2007) assert:

To gain recognition from the public, build the school image, determine school characteristics and brands, and obtain a sound reputation, a school must display its achievements, its quality, and the services it provides (paragraph 5).

Wurtzburg (2002) asserts:

Reduce the costs of learning for individuals and raise rates of return from investments. Policies and strategies also need to raise awareness of the benefits of investing, address barriers that prevent individuals from investing, and incorporate activities that reach and influence people in different market segments (pg 10).

## Delimitations

This study will not attempt to determine which education path is best. It will not attempt to find out which types of students go to which school. Nor will it attempt to determine the educational paths students should take. It will not attempt to make or suggest changes to school's programs. This study will only study the five schools chosen as part of the sample and only get the opinions of those students who participate in the intercept survey.

## Purpose of the study

This study will determine what public relations and marketing techniques vocational schools already use and why they chose to use those techniques. It will also attempt to find out what students think of their school and how they heard about the school.

## Problem Significance

Every year the number of high school graduates enrolling in college courses increases. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 68.1% of 2010 high school graduates enrolled in a college or university, despite the rising rate of unemployed college graduates.

However, little is done to educate high school students about other educational paths besides college. A vocational education path can present many working benefits including steady work and high income. As an excess bonus, despite a tough job market, many vocational schools maintain a high job placement rate (<http://www.stevenscollege.edu> 2011).

Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology is a prime example of a successful two-year technical school. According to their website, Thaddeus Stevens strives to “prepare students for skilled employment in a diverse, ever-changing workforce.. and dedicates itself to the development of Pennsylvania’s technical workforce.” (<http://www.stevenscollege.edu> 2011).

Thaddeus Stevens offers programs in automotive technology, computer drafting, mechanical engineering, heating and air conditioning repair, etc. It currently have over 800 students enrolled in its programs and maintains a 98% job placement rate (<http://www.stevenscollege.edu> 2011).

Richard Walker, director of education for the National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA), in Fort Washington, MD says almost every one of the 15,000 machine shops in the U.S. has a skilled worker shortage. This shortage causes work deadlines to be pushed back and in some instances work is turned away. Walker goes on to state there are about 20,000 job openings in the tooling industry alone that are currently unfilled because of the shortage of skilled-workers (Nikirk 2007).

One explanation for the increased interest in college could be that students believe a college degree it is the only way to make a good living; college may be the right path for some but for others. For example, students with C-average high school scores are less likely to succeed in college but may have the skill set to flourish at a vocational school. Many jobs exist and go unfilled due to the lack of individuals who have skill-specific training.

In February 2010, Harvard Graduate School of Education predicted 47 million new jobs will be created between now and 2018. Of those 47 million jobs, 14 million will require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree (Bairstow 2008).

In the book Other Ways to Win, the ‘one way to win paradigm’ explains three untrue beliefs that contribute to the “college-for-all” mentality. One, all high school graduates need a four-year college degree. Two, the only way to get a good paying job is to earn a college degree. Three, everyone wants to work in a professional occupation (Bray& Herr 2006). This “one way to win” mentality effects everyone from students to parents to the government and is causing an increase in unemployed college graduates and shortage in vocational work.

One researcher believes that the more college graduates who enter the workforce; the more individuals will be unemployed (Lambert 2010). Far too many individuals enroll in college just to drop out before graduating because they are unqualified to complete the work or learn the material.

One study found students who pay for college through student loans drop out 20% of the time and of that 20% who drop out, one-fifth already built up at least \$20,000 in debt before dropping out. Meaning these students have at least \$20,000 in debt and no degree to show for it. (Goldstein 2011).

“America has let a piece of its training infrastructure disappear. We let the vocational system become a dumping ground... Employers lost interest in supporting vo-tech schools,” says NTMA Executive Director, Matthew Coffey (Stamps 1998).

Charles Murray, political scientist and author of Real Education, Four simple truths for bringing America’s schools back to reality, states that in 2005, 1.5 million high school graduates enrolled in a four-year college. Those 1.5 million students convert to about 50% of total high school graduate population (Bairstow 2008). Murray says only 20% of high school graduates should enter into college so there is separation between the qualified student and the unqualified student. He continues to explain the value of a college degree is diminishing because students of high-quality and low-quality are both earning college degrees and there is no way to distinguish between the two groups of students (Bairstow 2008).

Murray believes many individuals go to college because of the expected increase in income, but says middle-management jobs are scarce in economic recessions. However, the job market remains forever steady and plentiful for skilled workers with a vocational background. “In America... finding first-class skilled labor is hard,” says Murray.

Some towns in Louisiana experience the downside of too many individuals with four-year college degrees. Executive Director of the Louisiana Workforce Commissions, Curt Eysink, says Louisiana’s job market cannot sustain the high amount of individuals with four-year degrees. Eysink believes Louisiana needs more vocational and 2-year degree graduates (Deslatte 2009). Eysink continues to say, “We do a great job of producing four-year college graduates. We don’t do a good job producing two-year completers. We’re producing a market we cannot employ in Louisiana.”

Thousands of unfilled jobs require more than a high school degree but less than a four-year degree and few people fall into that category in Louisiana (Deslatte 2009). This causes many to go unemployed and many jobs to go unfilled. Eysink believes with the proper training, Louisiana can fill vacant jobs, but it is hard to talk people out of a college education.

Some businesses are relocating to other parts of the U.S. because of the lack of workers in Louisiana. Jim Bernhard, owner and CEO of Shaw Group Inc., moved his company from Louisiana to North Carolina because he could not find enough skilled engineers to employ in his company (Deslatte 2009).

The 2007 Wall Street Journal article “On Education: What’s Wrong with Vocation Schooling?” sums the educational-workforce divide up by stating “Finding a good lawyer or physician is easy. Finding a good carpenter, painter, electrician, plumber glazier, mason – the list goes on – is difficult,” (Murray 2007).

Finding a way to communicate to the U.S. population that college is not the only way to succeed and that vocational work is dire need of workers is a difficult task. This research will enable public relation practitioners and marketing personnel at vocational schools to better attract students to their programs. They will know what techniques their school should use and how they can improve their own techniques.

They might also use this research to determine what individuals want from an education. Then vocational schools can match an individual’s wants with what their program offers.

Guidance counselors can also use this research to better serve the needs of students when it comes to career choices. They will know what factors encourage students to pursue vocational work and what factors serve as barriers. Therefore, guidance counselors will be better equipped to serve the student population’s career choice needs.

This research will contribute to the overall body of knowledge by providing school public relations practitioners with viable information they can use to enhance their school.

Practitioners of vocational schools in particular will be able to take the research and either improve or create new techniques to boost interest in vocational programs.

In turn, this researcher hopes more students will enroll in vocational schools and improve the imbalance in the U.S. education system. Increasing interest in vocational schools will lead to more skilled workers entering the workforce and decreasing unemployment.

#### Procedure

This thesis will use five in-depth interviews with public relations/ marketing practitioners at vocational schools to determine what techniques their school uses to attract students. Each interview will take between 20-30minutes and will be completed via phone interview. The questions will ask whether or not specific techniques are used to attract students and what techniques are especially helpful.

This researcher will also conduct 100 intercept surveys with students at five vocational schools to determine their thoughts and opinions on their particular vocational school. All survey participants will be selected on a volunteer basis and should take only 2-3 minutes.

## Definition of Terms

Barrier: a limit or something that holds an individual back from something they pursue

Career/ Guidance Counselor: someone whose job it is to talk to students about their future career goals and the paths they should take to reach their goals

Job Placement Rate: the percentage of students who find employment in their specific field upon graduating from a program, school or university.

Marketing: referring to school systems, determining what features and services interest students and their parents

Post-secondary: any form of higher education beyond high school

Public Relations: the practice or profession of establishing, maintaining, or improving a favorable relationship between an institution or person and the public

School-to-Work: a program that partners schools and businesses together by creating an easy transition for students to move from the classroom to the labor force

Self-efficacy: an individual's confidence in their knowledge, skills and abilities

Vocational schools: a high school or post secondary school that offers students training in a trade or skill that can be pursued as a career. It includes competency- based learning that involves academic knowledge, problem-solving, employability skills and occupation specific skills.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### High School Guidance

The Comprehensive Career Needs Survey asks students their perceptions and opinions of their school's career services. The questionnaire asks student about three particular aspects of guidance experiences:

1. How school services help in career planning
2. Students' level of confidence in finding an occupation they love
3. If students believe they will get the training and education they need

Research by Bloxom, Bernes, Magnussum, Gunn, Bardick, Orr and McKnight (2008) examines the experiences of twelfth grade students in Alberta, Canada. They presented students with a 19-item questionnaire split into two sections; career planning and career help. The researchers look at student perception of career guidance programs and what students expect to get out of career programs.

The first section of the questionnaire focuses on career plans, post-secondary plans, reasons for choosing occupation, encouragement and discouragement factors of career choice, importance of career planning and people who are helpful. Statistically, 38.4% plan on attending a college or vocational school part or full-time while 33.1% plan on working part or full-time. Results show only 18% of Grade 12 students are either in the processing of creating a plan or are unsure of what they want to do.

Student responses show that 79.5% of students would pursue a career that required a post-secondary education if they could pursue any occupation they want, regardless of the skills or education required. The top two factors, combining to 48.1%, that encourage career choice are income success and work satisfaction.

Working conditions, difficulty of education and personal factors are the top factors that discourage student career choices (Bloxom, Bernes, Magnussum, Gunn, Bardick, Orr and McKnight 2008).

Interestingly, 74.7% of students say career planning is either “quite important” or “very important,” but in the career help section of the survey students say that school programs and resources are only “somewhat helpful.”

And finally, 43.9% of students say they feel most comfortable asking parents for career help. More than 15% are comfortable asking counselors and 13.5% ask someone else in the field.

For the second section, career help, the researchers attempted to find out what students want from career planning programs. The top responses are first “finding a way to pursue my passion,” and second “understanding my interests and abilities,” (Bloxom etc.). Most students are confident they will find a job they love, obtain the training and education they need and work in an occupation they choose.

Some studies suggest that schools with school-to-work programs have lower dropout rates than schools that don't. Black (1993) believes this is because students are less likely to drop out if an adult cares about and takes an interest in students' futures by helping with career selection.

Super, Savickas and Super (1996) believe that career selection is not just what someone does for work. Career selection affects almost all other aspects of life including how individuals relate to one another to self-esteem. Therefore, researchers believe students need to review career choices with an adult who can explain the benefits and drawbacks of careers and help them make an informed decision.

Researchers Lapan, Gysbers and Sun (1997) examine how implementing the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program affects student career development. Researchers examined 22,964 Missouri high school students' perceptions of the program effects.

The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program trains counselors how to better serve student career development needs. The program focuses on three sections that guidance counselors use to organize the program, sustain the program and overall better serve students.

The first section covers career planning and exploration, students' knowledge of themselves and education or vocational development. The second section covers an organization's needs and resources. The third section covers how to sustain and enhance the program.

The research shows positive improvements after implementing the guidance program in Missouri schools. Findings show grades improve, the learning environment improve and students feel better prepared and informed about their future (Lapan, Gysbers and Sun 1997).

The Netherland Association of VET Colleges (2010) discusses three career topics that counselors should address when they meet with students regarding future career choices:

- a. Examine motives, ambitions and qualities,
- b. Discuss work opportunities that fit the student's skills and personality,
- c. Aim career development at student's motives, ambitions and qualities.

According to Meijers (2008) these topics are part of integral career guidance, a learning system that involves a variety of programs, tests and methods used to help discover strengths and weaknesses, ambitions, and preferences.

Career conversation is one division of integral career guidance. Conversations provide students with one-on-one guidance that is highly important. One-on-one guidance allows for students to properly reflect on their work and their future career objectives. It also increases a student's reflection of their other career possibilities, according to Bullock & Jaminson (1998) and Mittendorff (2008).

In another study, Mittendorff, den Brook, and Beijaard (2010) observe conversations between teachers and students in Dutch vocational schools. The researchers look at four aspects of career conversations.

First, conversation content because "it is important for teachers to discuss students personality, qualities, motivations and ambitions in relation to future work, norms and values in relations to labour but also professional experience and characteristics of certain professions," suggests Mittendorff, den Brook and Beijaard (2010). Second, researchers look at actions of teachers. Third, they look at student actions. And finally, the researchers look at the relationship between the teacher and student.

Bullock and Jamieson (1998) and Mitterndorff (2008) believe career conversations are especially important because students struggle to take all the information and mentally organize it into making future career decisions.

The researchers discuss three findings from their content analysis. Conversations do not always address student's self-reflection, their futures and their personal development plans. Conversations often do not address career issues, characteristics of professions or work-

related experience. And also, teachers often dominate the conversation which does not allow the student to properly self-reflect.

Mittendorff, den Brook and Beijaard's research work focuses on career guidance on a daily basis. In Dutch schools, teachers assume the responsibilities of providing students with career guidance instead of assigned guidance counselors.

Enderlein, Heer and Hoyt agree that both academic and vocational students benefit when teachers discuss career development on a daily basis throughout regular learning activities. This differs from when students have planned meetings with guidance counselors throughout the semester. However, some schools think the best way to address career guidance is through workshops and student activities.

Calhoun County businesses and local schools in Jacksonville, Alabama team up for REACH, Readiness Education Achieving Career Heights (Friery, Nelson, 2004). REACH is a program that educates high school students about career opportunities in the Calhoun County area through workshop activities.

The student-run program involves doing research about and taking pictures of company's facilities. They create PowerPoint presentations they share with ten area schools. The Powerpoint presentations teach students about what each company does and what jobs are found within the company. Over a three year period, 6,000 students have been involved in the REACH workshops.

The overall results of the workshops are positive. Teachers involved in the REACH program state that often times, businesses try to attract students by simply using brochures but using PowerPoint presentations and interactive workshops, the REACH program continues to help students learn about job opportunities and responsibilities of local

companies (Friery, Nelson, 2004). Other school districts address career guidance in a completely different way.

The life-simulation program, *MyLife*, teaches students about what costs and responsibilities are associated with living expenses. This program helps students plan a future that matches their expected lifestyle. Steve Beutler, a career counselor at Minot High School in Minot, North Dakota, created the program to motivate students about school and to explore careers that suit their personalities, interests and skills.

*MyLife* allows students to look at what it costs to be living on their own and paying bills. There are six sections to the program including rent or buy a home, transportation, monthly bills, living expenses, career exploration and shopping expenses. Beutler (2008) says that after completing the *MyLife* program students are more likely to have realistic goals and work harder to reach those goals.

### Career Choice

Researchers Mei Tang, Wei Pan, and Newmeyer (2008) examine high school students from Midwest Suburban public schools to find out their views on learning experiences, career self- efficacy, expected outcome, career interests and career choices.

The study is based on the Social Cognitive Career Development Theory (1996), also known as SCCT, which says a student's career choice depends on their personal experiences, career self-efficacy and career interest. SCCT closely relates to Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory which says people are more likely to engage in tasks when they feel confident about their abilities and likely to avoid tasks they do not.

Researchers believe self-efficacy is the biggest deciding factor in career choice and bridges a student background experiences and expected outcome (Mei Tang, Wei Pan and

Newmeyer 2008). Self-efficacy is created through an individual's personal variants including gender and predispositions, and by contextual factors such as learning experiences.

Lent (2001) studies a sample of 111 college students and finds that self-efficacy and perceived outcomes are the best career predictors while support and barriers are loosely predictive factors.

In a similar study, researchers Tien, Wang and Liu (2009) conduct a study that examines the career choices behaviors, career self-efficacy and career barriers of Taiwanese high school students. The researchers study students using the Chinese Career Self-Efficacy Inventory and the Chinese Career Barrier Inventory. The CCSEI determines the confidence that students have in their skills in regards to Halland's R.I.A.S.E.C. The CCBI lists 80 items that examine 12 barrier areas using a 9-point Likert-scale to rate barriers.

In terms of career choice behavior, men and women score differently in realistic, enterprising and artistic careers. The two instruments show that men and women view self-efficacy and career barriers differently. For example, women are less confident in r-type careers which are associated with math and science fields. In comparison, women are more confident in artistic-type fields. However, in i-type fields, including law and psychology, both men and women score equally in self-efficacy.

Career barriers include sex discrimination, inadequate experience and discouraged nontraditional careers. Sexual discrimination and inadequate experiences are viewed as a barrier, specifically in artistic, social, enterprising and conventional fields, for women but not men (Tien, Wang and Liu 2009). However, men state that entering nontraditional careers was a barrier that they would consider.

Tang, Pan, and Newmeyer (2008), measure their study using Holland's RIASEC model to find student interests. There are six types; Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional.

Results show that females have higher expected outcomes and lower self-efficacy in careers that deal with Data/Things. However, they have high self-efficacy, interest and career choices that deal with People/Ideas (Tang, Pan and Newmeyer, 2008).

Scores are the exact opposite for males in self-efficacy, career choice and interest. Meaning, guidance counselors must look at gender, self-efficacy, interests and expected outcome when considering student career paths (Tang, Pan, and Newmeyer, 2008).

Gottfredson (2005) suggests that by age 13 children fully understand gender-dominance in certain professions and prestige levels. Around this age children begin to subconsciously narrow career choices based on gender and prestige levels.

Ali, McWhirter and Chronister (2005) study the effects that economic backgrounds have on career choice. The study finds that according to ninth-graders, sibling and peer supports are most important to educational and vocational self-efficacy.

Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) discover the effects of culture on career choice and finds the affects vary among different racial and ethical groups.

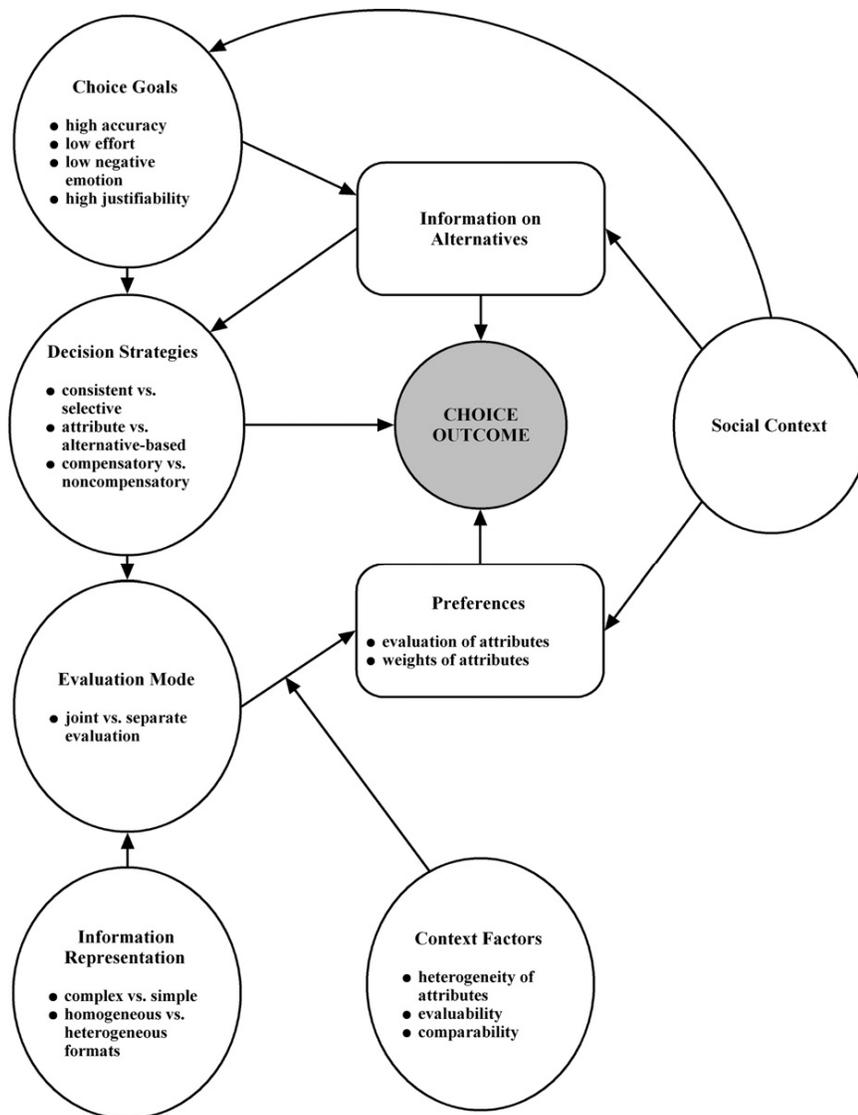
Mani (2005) takes a close look at career decision-making by Sikh Indo-Canadian women. The researcher specifically examines the perceived support and barriers of the women who all are pursuing social science studies at universities. The study finds that perceived support and barriers are greatly affected by self-efficacy appraisals.

Researcher Henry Sauermann (2005) examines how individuals make decisions when barriers exist such as limited information, conflicting preferences, social demands and

cognitive limitations. The model shown below and created by Sauermaun is based on the behavior decision-making findings of Bettman, Luce and Payne.

The model presents two major ideas that relate to the decision-making process. First, *decision strategies* affect an individual's perspective of four *choice goals*. Strategy is affected either positively or negatively by *attributes* and *preferences* (Sauermaun 2005).

Second, *evaluation mode*, the weighing of alternative choices, and attribute characteristics frame an individual's preference choices which in turn affect *choice outcome*.



Individuals benefit by matching their personal characteristics with an organization's characteristics, according to Holland (1997) and Kristof (1996).

### Vocational vs. Traditional High Schools

The economic shift from the industrial age to the information age prompts academic change in the United States education system. One major change was the Smith- Hughes Act (1917) which increased the number of vocational education schools. However, increasing the number of schools does not solve the larger problem of how to educate students with the skills they need to enter the work force (Pucel 1998).

In the 1970s, students could learn academic knowledge and still have time to receive the technical skills needed for their specific career path. Today, the amount of academic knowledge required of students has dramatically increased and little time exists for students to gain skill-specific training (Pucel 1998). Most states now offer a post- secondary vocational education option for students who want skill-specific training.

In chapter three of In Education Reform and Vocational Education (U.S. Department of Education 1998), the amendments to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Act of 1984 states that "funds made available... shall be used to provide vocational education in programs that... integrate academic and vocational education in such programs through coherent sequences of courses so that students achieve both academic and occupational competencies."

This chapter looks closely into the literature from 1987-1992 that has been produced about this topic. It presents both sides of a policy to integrate vocational schooling into traditional high school settings. It states that federal legislators believe that by integrating vocational education into schools, the United States will be able to produce more people who have the academic and occupational skills needed to keep up with technology. Employers

claim that the U.S. workforce lacks the basic skills needed for high-tech demand jobs (National Assessment of Vocational Education).

Many different views exist of how integrating vocational classes will mean to education. Some believe it will allow students opportunities for both academic and vocational learning. Others think that it will allow teachers from both sides to share teaching methods (National Assessment of Vocational Education). Some believe the academic classroom teaches basic skills and there is no need for vocational schools until much later.

Survey results from the National Association of Manufacturers (Engler 2007) examine the lack of skills of manufacturing workers. The research states that 63% of workers lack basic math skills, which have become increasingly important due to technological advances. Nearly 55% of workers lack the ability to read and translate complex work material.

These skills reinforce the much needed change to the education curriculum (Engler 2007). Some changes include “career major” and applied instruction. “Career major” provides students with a mixed of academic and vocational education that is directed towards their specific career path. Applied instruction is a teaching method that demonstrates how specific knowledge and skills are used in their specific career.

The U.S. and Europe are each prime examples of the benefits of general education versus vocational education. According to Goldwin (2000), the U.S. favors general education for its students. This system provides individuals with a smooth transition between careers and the ability to deal with technological advances. European countries favor apprenticeships and specialized training which benefits individuals who select their career focus and stick to jobs within that career spectrum.

Researchers Aynsley and Crossouard (2010) also examine higher education systems in south-east England. They argue that people perceive vocational schooling as second best to higher education because of over-specification in a single field. They also perceive vocational programs as second best because they are constantly being change and so there is no way to measure if the programs are successful or not.

Morley, Aynsley, Eraut, MacDonald and Shepherd (2006) explain that in some instances, groups who do not attend higher education do better in the labor force. Employers are quicker to hire workers who have more experience than those who have subject knowledge. This creates fear among respondents because they have no job security, no experience and lots of school debt.

Although the respondents in this article cite examples of success stories without the pursuit of higher education, not all respondents found success in vocational education. Most of the respondents did cite having bad experiences in school. Therefore, no path is said to be better or worse than the other (Morley, Aynsley, Eraut, MacDonald and Shepherd 2006).

Careership theory argues that pursuing higher education is something that the middle-class assumes as part of their future. It is set in their biographical and institutional habits (Boudieu 1990, Hodkinson, Spakes & Hodkinson 1996). If that statement is true then it may be true for the working-class who chose not to pursue higher education because it is not part of their biographical and institutional habits (Boudieu 1990, Hodkinson, Spakes & Hodkinson 1996). The researchers call this “intentionality without intention” and believe that pursuing higher education is embedded in a person’s social class.

One article (Gentry, Peters, Mann 2007) looks at a particular school and compares both “talented” and “general” students’ experiences at their traditional school compared to their experiences at their vocational school.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) prepares students for careers in wood, metal, auto shop, etc. upon graduation from a high school or post-secondary vocational school (Gentry, Peters, Mann 2007). This article has all students, both “talented” and “general,” attend both the CTE center and their traditional high school.

Researchers then conduct interviews to ask students’ about their experiences. Students from both groups liked the CTE program better than their traditional high school. Students cite independence, caring teachers, students with similar interests, and relevant content as the top aspects they enjoy about the CTE program (Gentry, Peters, Mann 2007). Many other benefits have been found from students who enter into CTE programs.

Stone’s study (2004) finds that tougher academic coursework and higher-level math is associated with students who enroll in the CTE program. Stone, Castellano, Stringfield and Farley also find that science and English class scores are better in schools that offer CTE programs. Research also shows 60% of CTE students enroll in post-secondary education.

Ahmet (2003) also uses the school systems of foreign countries to study the factors that influence elementary students. In Canakkale, Turkey, students in grades 6-8 choose to attend either general or vocational high schools. This study examines how gender, academic achievement, rural or urban living and parental involvement affect students choice of school.

According to METARGEM (1997), Turkey prefers a system where only 35% of students attend traditional high schools and 65% pursue vocational work. Currently, the system has 60% attending traditional high schools and only 40% pursue vocational work which causes a

major imbalance between the needs of society and the wants of its population. The wants of the overall population are affected by a variety of places.

Some researchers believe parental involvement increases academic achievement (Coleman 1999, Epstein 1991) and other believe it hinders academic achievement (Horn and West 1992). Researchers Coleman (1998), McDonough (1997) and McNeal (1999) suggest that parental education is the best predictor for a child's academic achievement. Through questionnaires researchers discover general and vocational high school students differ in personality traits such as dominance, independence, adaption, creativity, and persistence scores.

The findings (Ahmet 2003) conclude that general students are more likely to go to college and be involved in school. General education students are less likely to believe they would ever reach their ideal occupation. Other interesting findings show a student's elementary school achievement is negatively associated with the student's choice of general school which could mean that general students are less likely to be successful in the future. And finally, guidance is negatively associated with both vocational and general high school students. Turkey is not the only country who has run into problems with student career choice.

Romania experienced an educational reform in 1973 because of their economic shift from communism to a market economy. During this shift, Romania's economy was negatively impacted and some of the blame was placed on the inflexibility of vocational training (Malamud and Pop-Eleches 2010).

Prior to 1973, Romanian students would receive eight years of general education and then choose whether to pursue vocational training. But because of the reform, students were

required to receive ten years of general education which meant less time for vocational training. The reform only affected students who did not plan on receiving the additional two years but who had planned on pursuing vocational training (Malamud and Pop-Eleches 2010).

The data the researchers use include the sample of the 1992 Romanian census, the sample of the 2002 Romanian census, and six annual LSMS, Living Standards Measurement Studies, surveys from 1995-2000. No significant findings prove there is a difference in labor market participation or overall earnings. The only conclusive finding is that men who are affected by the reform are more likely to work in jobs that do not require manual labor. But not all career choice research is conclusive and poses more questions than it answers.

Watts and Bridge question students who decide not to pursue higher education and find their goals and expectations are 'different' from the norm but not 'lower.' Although plenty of research is done on the differences between academic education and vocational education, little is known about the mixed educational paths.

Researchers, Tuor and Backes-Gellner (2010), investigate the "risk-return trade-offs" for Swiss individuals on different educational paths; purely academic, purely vocational and mixed. The study compares earnings, lifetime net earnings and academic paths of employees and entrepreneurs.

The Swiss schooling system is not all that different from the U.S. Students receive a general education for nine years. After nine years they choose to either continue in the schooling system or receive vocational training. Students may switch but only after receiving a "Matura" degree from academic schooling or completing a vocational apprenticeship.

Dearden (1999) finds individuals who pursue a purely academic education earn higher wages than individuals who pursue a purely vocational education. However, when years of study is factored into the calculations the gap between earnings shrinks.

Researchers determine that Swiss individuals are rewarded in the labor force for their mixed education background in both academics and vocational skills. It also proves risk is a significant concern when individuals select their education paths. Finally, mixed education is viewed more favorably when comparing overall earnings and less favorably when comparing rate of return (Tuor, Backes- Gellner 2010).

Acemoglu and Pischke believe no statement can be made as to saying which path is better until further empirical research is conducted.

#### Enrollment at Vocational Schools

The United States is not the only place where students are losing interest in vocational education. Decreased enrollment and investment in vocational education is happening all over the world. Haukka, Keating and Lamb (2004) studied international programs and developed key mechanisms that create vocational schools systems that maximize resources.

Wurzburg (2002) states marketing techniques must make people aware of the benefits and the barriers. It must also attract people from different marketing segments. Benefits of vocational schooling include more job opportunities, higher salary, better career prospects, lower probability of unemployment, increased job satisfaction and an improved working environment.

Barriers prevent people from investing in education. Barriers include lack of money, difficulty assessing benefits, time pressures, family commitment, past negative experiences, poor information, having a disability and most of all, the lack of interest or need.

The key messages that must be addressed are as follows (Haukka, Keating and Lamb 2004):

- Financing vocational schools is becoming more expensive. Education fees from students account for only 4.5% of revenue.
- Individuals need to see value in or return for their investment
- Schools must use techniques that will show individuals the benefits of vocational education and training
- Government accounts for 80% of revenue so vocational schools must prove they are worth government investment money.

Wurzburg (2002) also listed some mechanisms to help address the key messages above. One way to increase enrollment is through learning accounts so individuals have a place to save money to use towards their future education. Another way is through student loans allowing students to pay for part of their education and then paying the rest back over time.

Vouchers can be given to individuals by employers or the government as an incentive payment to continue schooling. Employers could also give employees paid leave to commit full-time to getting their education. Used mostly in Europe, employers excuse individuals for an extended time so that they can further their education to benefit the company in the future.

Taiwanese schools use marketing strategies and images to attract students (Huang, Wang and Tai 2007). The Taiwan general high school to vocational high school ratio in 2006 was 314:157 which is significantly different from 10 years prior when the ratio was about 50:50.

Researchers explain that like the United States, Taiwan has seen a drastic change in the number of students who pursue college degrees. They study the correlation between school marketing and school image in eight types of vocational schools and found 31.1% of school image can be predicted using five variables. The five variables are quality, place, image, promotion, and price (Huang, Wang and Tai 2007).

They believe the best way to attract students is to display school and student achievements, display its quality, build school image and obtain a good reputation. They also make recommendations to improve vocational schools (Huang, Wang and Tai 2007):

1. To value the fulfillment of school marketing and to enhance positive school image
2. To investigate resources in and out of schools and to require the quality of schools. Three methods are suggested to meet this goal:
  - a. display multiple achievements of students and design various courses and activities
  - b. flexibly adjust strategies of school marketing depending on school resources
  - c. improve the effectiveness of administration, the attitude of teaching and the passion for providing services

Examples of successful PR and marketing techniques can be found in many schools across the country. Some believe that a successful vocational school starts and ends with the enthusiasm and passion of vocational school teachers and school districts (Ries 1999).

Jon Groth, a teacher at Porter County Area Vocational District, in north Indiana says it best, “It is not my job to be a salesman but if we’re not salesman then kids won’t find out about us and won’t have an opportunity to benefit from our program.”

Groth (Ries 1999) goes on to explain that although school marketing is important to a school’s image, the school also must offer students what they want and give them an opportunity to enhance their skills. For example, Porter County Area Vocational District connected students’ interests in police work and a local need for private security at casinos. They now offer a law enforcement program that already has a long wait list.

Interesting programs are not the only incentive that gets students to attend vocational schools. Normally, when parents are informed about vocational programs, they are excited their child can go to school and pursue a career that pays well and in turn, pays for their own schooling (Ries 1999).

Word of mouth can also help a program. Kids see their friends doing exciting things in a classroom setting and how much money they can make doing it. Getting kids to be accountable and feel ownership towards their work is also crucial to a winning program. Simply put, having an attractive vocational school program is all about listening to students, studying what the market needs and staying ahead of the curve.

Washington County Technical High School exemplifies success in attracting students (Nikirk 2007). It is the only vocational-technical school in the county and must compete with eight other purely academic high schools to attract students into its programs.

Students begin to choose their education path around eighth and ninth grade so it is important that the school attract students early. Washington County Technical High School does this by setting up information booths during “transition night” at middle schools throughout the county.

Technical professionals talk to students and their parents at the booth allowing them to explore opportunities available at vocational schools. One key attraction for the school is its gaming design and animation program, the first in Maryland. Tech professionals also encourage students and parents to set up meetings with career teachers from the school so they can learn more about the program and help narrow career options.

The Washington County Technical High School also opened its doors to middle school students with the help of eighth and ninth grade guidance counselors. Once a year students sign up to visit the school to see first-hand what they would be learning and talk to students who are currently in the program.

Washington's technical school also markets its school by running community activities. Every winter, students in the computer game design and animation programs team with community libraries to create winter animations that the library displays for the community.

They also run a "Tech Show" where seniors in the program present and show off the work they have done throughout the year. Not only do parents and students attend the show but also businesses and post-secondary vocational schools attend to recruit students. The school also recruits by offering non-credit, summer courses taught by the school's teachers through a "College for Kids" program. For example, during this program the gaming design and animation teacher runs a course that teaches students how to create their own video games.

Lancaster County Schools in Pennsylvania takes another approach to hands on learning. Once a year, it moves their students from inside the classroom to on the job learning. Plumbing, carpentry, electrician wiring, and masonry skills come together to build a home in the community (Holusha 1994). This program gives students real-life experience allowing them to see what the job is like. Workers from companies in the area supervise students and some even hire the students after graduation.

"The United States is unique among industrial countries in that it does not have an organized postsecondary education system for the noncollege-bound," says Lester Thurow, an economist at MIT (Holusha 1994).

The program was developed to meet the demands of the economy, improve vocational school training and offer an experience based program for students who do not want to pursue college. The program also guarantees a job upon graduation.

"We say that if students come to school 95% of the time, maintain a C-average or better and graduates, we guarantee a job in their specialty or they can come to school for free until

we find a job for them,” says Richard Burley, director of the three-school vocational technical program in south-central Pennsylvania (Holusha 1994).

Other vocational schools Hall (2008) teach the public that not only is vocational work needed but that they make good money, averaging a salary anywhere from \$23,000- \$59,000.

Dr. Cheri Jimeno, President of Owen Community College in Toledo, Ohio says that community contractors keep the program running. Employers need workers who have the appropriate skills and also need their current employees to be certified (Hall 2008).

Owens Community College got rid of their heating, ventilating, and air conditioning repair (HVACR) program 15 years ago and it now realizes it was a mistake. Owen is dedicated to offering a full HVACR program and shedding the perception that “vocational schooling is second best” to college education.

From 2006-07, Owens has partnered with 450 companies and has trained 5,000 students. One interesting finding is that the average age of students in the program is 28-30. This may be because people graduate from four-year colleges and spend a few years in their careers and realize they do not like it. So they go back to school to find a job that requires a skill, pays well and has job security. Vocational training is often times the answer (Hall 2008).

Maine’s technical colleges are a good example of how vocational schools have changed over the years to adapt to the needs of the economy (Fitzsimmons 1999). In 1962, the state Department of Education established 3 vocational technical institutions, VTI, whose mission was to “prepare people for immediate employment as well as for future growth and career changes.” The institutions taught both traditional education and technical education classes.

The schools slowly built a positive reputation throughout the community and saw an increase in enrollment. Another bonus is that students were easily finding jobs in their

specific fields. The VTI's programs prepared workers for technical careers and also supplied employers with qualified workers.

By 1999, Maine had seven vocational technical institutions with more than 5,000 students. However, some individuals could not commit to school full-time so the schools implemented fast-track programs where students could get training in as little as two months.

Another way Maine tried to get students involved in vocational careers is "Tech-prep" programs (Fitzsimmons 1999). These programs are aimed at students who do not plan on attending colleges but instead choose a vocational career. Students learn traditional classes, like math and science, but also hands-on skills, like drafting. In 1999, more than 4,000 high school students were enrolled in Maine's tech-prep programs.

Internships and career awareness activities are also offered to students through MCA, Maine Career Advantage. Companies who employ students through the MCA internship program, often times offer to pay for the student's tuition at the technical school.

#### PR and Marketing Techniques for Schools

According to Cutler (2000), school public relations did not exist until after the Great Depression when government dramatically cut education funds and the schools turned to taxpayers to help make up for lost funds.

The National School Public Relations (1999) states a good PR practitioner needs:

1. honest and open with their personnel and their organization's behavior
2. interest in people and their welfare
3. good communication skills
4. ability to think strategically and in non-traditional ways
5. ability to do research and solve problems
6. interest in seeing others succeed
7. creativity

Hughes and Hooper (2000) made a list of four key PR practitioner roles;

1. Develop two-way communication path that allows community members and the school to exchange information and feedback.
2. Find a way to get community members involved in school programs
3. Create a network where community members can voice their thoughts or concerns about school issues and monitor the network on a regular basis
4. Allow community members and school representatives to communicate face-to-face

Bagin, Gallagher and Moore stress the need for school-community relations. School-community relations is a “function on all levels of a school system, established as a program to improve and maintain optimal levels of student achievement, and to build and maintain public support.” Without community support, the authors believe it will be hard for a school to succeed. It is the job of the public relations practitioners to build up a relationship with the surrounding community so that key audiences communicate effectively.

School public relation practitioners need to communicate with parents to earn their trust and respect as well as become a valued part of local communities, according to Brandt (1998) and Willis (1995). Schools need parents and communities to stand behind them and add support says Kowalski (2000).

One major problem that surrounds public schools is the negative perception it receives from parents. Parents are frustrated because they feel like they have no say over their child’s education, says Culter (2000).

But in order to gain community support, schools needed to communicate the good work going on in the schools. This is critical since the further removed an individual is from the school, the more distrustful they become of the school (Auntunes 2002).

Researchers Meek (1999), Hughes and Hooper (2000), Saffir (2000) and Kowalski (2000), name the top objectives of the average school public relations practitioner. The main

objective is to increase and improve internal communication between administration, principals, teachers and everyone else involved.

PR practitioners need superb writing and verbal communication skills as well as having exceptional technological skills. They also need to be able to listen and reflect concerns and comments through active-listening. Furthermore, they need to create and execute their plan and later gather and analyze the feedback.

Since the late 80s and 90s, schools compete against one another for funds, resources, students and public value (Cookson 1994; Levin 2001; Lubienski 2005; Nir 2003). Around this time, more families began to send their child to another school rather than the public school in their area. This prompted school marketing to become a crucial school function.

The responsibility of marketing their school falls into the hands of middle and high school principals. Studies find in the United Kingdom, the majority of school principals and staffs have no marketing research, strategies or plan in place to compete in this newly-developed system (Bell 1999, Forskett 2002, Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown 2004).

Researcher, Izhar Oplatka, interviewed eight public school principals in southern Israel. He uses Marshall and Rossman's (2005) four stages to organize the data, generate categories, test the hypothesis and compare alternate explanations.

The findings show more principals believe they must market their school in order for it to succeed. Also, those principals must "strive to generate an association between moral and instructional leadership that is committed to education, innovation, values, and improvement and the marketing-related tasks in their role," says Oplatka. However, very few principals have a plan to conduct research on how to determine student needs and attract them to their school, according to Kotler and Fox.

Schools must adapt to changes in the market or they will ultimately fail. It is becoming ever more popular that students are attending schools outside their district. Online schooling and home schooling are prevailing as competition for local schools (Oplatka 2007). School PR practitioners must treat their school like a business and market it accordingly to find out what the customers want and give them that product.

In order to have a good public relations plan, it is critical to find out the school's goals and strategies. Bagin, Gallagher and Moore provide a five-step model for marketing a school (The School and Community Relations 2008). First, analyze the current environment and find out what direction school leader want to take when marketing their school. Second, develop a strategy to determine who should they should market to and what they should market. Third, write a marketing plan to reach the school's goals. Fourth, execute the plan and then finally evaluate the results by conducting follow up research.

## Summary

The increasing divide between students who attend college and students who attend vocational schools can be attributed to many factors but this researcher believes that there are certain techniques that vocational schools can use to attract students. Current research suggests that it is important to educate students and parents about the opportunities that are presented with a vocational school degree. Vocational schools might also consider partnering with schools or community organizations to market their school to students and parents. There is also a need to end the negative connotation of vocational schools as being a "second-class" education.

Chapter three will outline in detail the methods that this researcher will use for the study to determine what techniques are being used by vocational schools.

## CHAPTER III

### STUDY DESIGN

Data Needed

**H1: It is expected that if vocational schools use certain public relations techniques, more students would attend vocational school programs.**

This study will attempt to find out what public relations techniques vocational schools use and how they can improve on these techniques to increase enrollment.

This study will rely on quantitative research to find out what techniques are used and also qualitative research to find out what students like and dislike about their current school. By gathering both types of research, this study will offer public relations practitioners a better understanding of how to market their school. The research will also aim to discover what techniques public relations practitioners believe to be the most effective when attracting students.

## Data Sources

Quantitative research will be gathered by conducting five in-depth interviews with five randomly selected public relation practitioners at vocational schools. Each subject will be asked a series of questions about specific techniques used by his or her school to attract students. Depending upon each answer, follow up questions will be asked requiring a detailed response as to why or why not each specific technique is used. Each interview will be recorded and will last anywhere from 20-30 minutes depending upon the responses.

In-depth interviews will be conducted over the phone. Some questions include “What do you think are the top three reasons that students do not attend vocational schools?” and “What factors do you think affect student enrollment in vocational programs?” A full list of survey questions can be found in the appendix section.

Subjects will be chosen using a non-probable, non-scientific volunteer sample. No subject will have prior knowledge of the interview questions, only a general idea about the interview topic which is “public relations techniques used by vocational schools.” No subject will receive any reward for their time during the interview, however, if asked, the subject may receive a copy of the work after it is finalized and grades are given. If asked, subjects’ personal names may be kept anonymous. Also, some background information, such as the number of students enrolled at the school, can be found on the school website if it is listed. It is also helpful to ask the subject if he or she knows anyone else in the their field who would be willing to also be interviewed.

Qualitative research will be gathered through short intercept questionnaires given to students currently enrolled at one of the five chosen vocational schools. Twenty questionnaires will be gathered from each school. An attempt will be made to gather results

from students with a variety of demographics including gender, age and program specification. The subjects will be asked questions pertaining to three topic areas; personal demographics, satisfaction with their school and recommended improvements.

Subjects will be selected using a non-probable, non-scientific volunteer sample. All subjects will remain anonymous and no compensation will be given for questionnaire responses. Any questionnaires that are considered inappropriate or are unfinished will not be part of the sample. The researcher will make this judgment decision will be left up to the researcher. This researcher will aim to gather 100 completed responses.

The questionnaires may be completed in person or may be given to one of the in-depth interview subjects so they can gather the information since some schools are strict about research on their schools' campus. When gathering the information first hand, it is left up to the researcher as to whether the questionnaire is filled out by the subject or the researcher. This researcher combined both types.

This researcher seeks to discover ways in which vocational schools can improve on their current public relations techniques so that more students choose to enroll in vocational school programs. This researcher hopes that by doing this, the imbalance between student school choice and economic job opportunities will be lessened, meaning that more students will choose vocational schools rather than college because more job opportunities exist in vocational fields. This researcher hopes that a secondary effect of this research will be that vocational schools shake the negative connotation that it has been given as a "second-class education."

## Data Collection

All interview and surveys will be conducted between February 12, 2012 and May 1, 2012.

## Data Analysis

This researcher will record each in-depth interview and place a copy of the interview in the appendix section. Excel software will be used to analyze the intercept results. Chapter four will detail the findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS

**H1: It is expected that if vocational schools use certain public relations techniques, more students would attend vocational school programs.**

#### Interview Responses

Six in-depth interviews with PR/marketing practitioners at vocational schools were conducted to determine what techniques vocational schools use to attract students. Among other things, the interviews also aimed to find out why or why not students decide to attend vocational schools.

The six respondents, from schools in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Massachusetts were; Cindy Zomar from Assabet Regional Technical High School; Michele Wilczynski from Berks Institute of Technology; Lori Perlow from Mercer County Technical Schools; Shannon Brennan from McCann School of Business and Technology; Chad Baker from Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology; Suzanne Gold from Camden County Technical Schools. Respondent were asked 12 questions with some questions asked for in-depth explanations.

#### Enrollment

Assabet and Berks Institute had 1,000 students enrolled. Thaddeus Stevens had around 800 enrolled. Camden County had 802 Pennsauken Campus and 1,341 at the Gloucester Campus. Mercer County and McCann had various campuses in their area. Mercer County had 500 students as of 2007-2008. The number of students at McCann is unknown.

## Programs

Assabet offered 15 programs. Berks Institute offered 17 programs. Mercer County offered 45 different program options for adult evening programs. Additionally, it offered 10 different options for high school career students and nine shared time options for students in both regular high school and technical high school classes. McCann offered 27 degree programs and 19 diploma programs. Thaddeus Stevens offered 22 programs. Finally, Camden County offered 33 programs to students.

## Job placement rate

Since some schools were high schools rather than post-secondary schools the job placement rate is unknown. Berks Technical's job placement rate was 78-80%. Mercer county's job placement rate was 85.4%, while Thaddeus Steven's had a 98% placement rate.

## Enrollment change

All respondents said that enrollment in their programs had either "slightly increased" or "drastically increased." When asked what they attributed to the increase, each responded differently. The impact of economy was one explanation. Respondents also suggested improved reputation of technical schools, increased student interest and student fiscal responsibility. Other explanations depended on the school's behavior and included their involvement in the community and the school's good reputation. Michele Wilczynski said:

There are a lot of high school seniors that their parents want them to go to college but they are better off to maybe enroll in a 2 year IT program, come out as a web designer with an associate degree and have the benefit of the career service department who tries to find a job for you. As you're aware, when you graduate from a four year college, you get your degree and a hand shake and that's it.

## Reasons for not attending vocational schools

The top responses that were repeated among all respondents were misconceptions, lack of information and stigma. There seems to be a misconception that everyone needs a four-year degree to get a good job. Respondents also believe people are uninformed about what programs vocational schools offer. Chad Baker believes that “People think the work is dirty and difficult work with low wages when really advances in technology causes students to work on computers and other programs.”

The stigma of vocational schools that they are schools for “dumb” or “bad” kids is the final reason the respondents listed. Other responses were peer pressure, socioeconomic factors and lots of competition among.

## Factors affecting enrollment

No definite consensus was reached for which factors were thought to affect enrollment and which ones do not. For example, some respondents thought parental influence was a big influence while others did not. Each respondent thought differently.

## Working with high schools

The two vocational high schools were the only schools that did not work with the local high schools. Assabet explained that they want to work with their local high schools but receive resistance. Camden County did not work with its local high schools. The rest of the schools gave presentations in high schools in their area to try to recruit students.

## On the job experience

Each school either encouraged or mandated students to complete an internship. In some cases, an externship required students to work for a business to get on-the-job experience.

### Informing parents

Although the degree to which the schools reached out to parents varied, each school made an effort to inform and get parents involved in the process. Some of the strategies used were parent nights, after-hour events and open houses. Schools also indirectly reach out to parents by sending information home with potential students to give to their parents.

### Advertisements

Assabet advertised in local newspapers, and also at fairs, malls and movie theaters. Berks Technical, McCann and Thaddeus Stevens advertised on all three channels; newspaper, TV and radio; however, Thaddeus Stevens had cut back on print advertisements. Camden County only used TV and newspaper advertisements and Mercer County did not focus on advertising.

### How students find out

Assabel found word-of-mouth, afterhour exhibits and parental involvement were huge channels for recruiting students. Berks Institute asks where students hear about their school on day one when they meet with an admissions counselor. People found out a variety of ways that students find out about their school including advertisements, tables at sporting events and word-of-mouth. McCann and Thaddeus Stevens found that people know about their school in a multitude of ways. Chad Baker from Thaddeus Stevens said “even if I had \$1 million to advertise it still wouldn’t be as successful as word-of-mouth.” Mercer County does not ask where students find out about their school.

## Survey Responses

One hundred twenty intercept surveys were conducted with vocational school students for two main reasons. First, how did students hear about their particular school and second, how satisfied they are with their school.

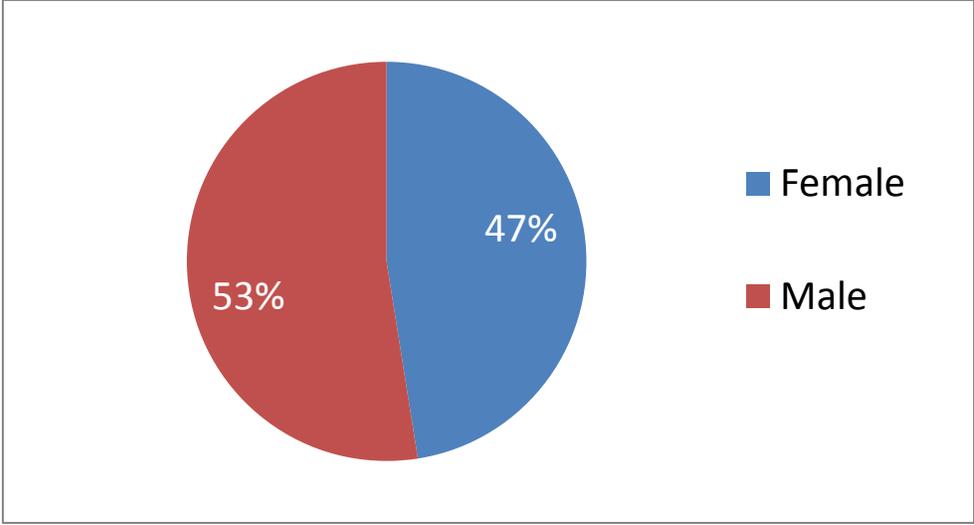


Figure 1: *Gender of Participants*

The gender of the survey participants were nearly split with the slight majority favoring males (53%).

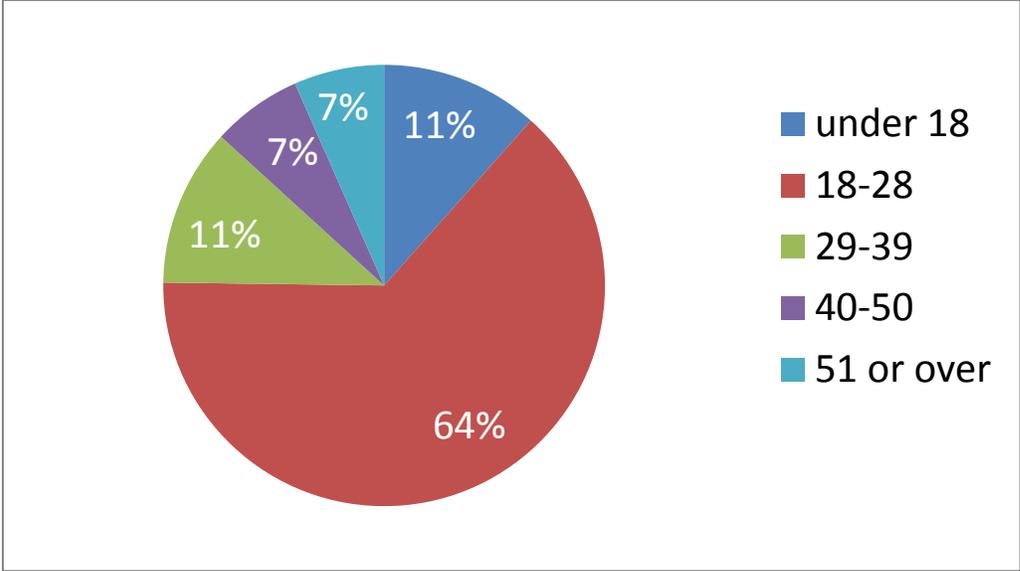


Figure 2: *Ages of participants*

The majority (64%) of participants were between ages 18-29. The rest of the participants were nearly equal in distribution.

Table 1: *Program enrollment*

While the number of students enrolled in health-related fields (30) was the largest, the rest of the sample population was similar in size with a few programs only having only one student enrolled in the program.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Number Enrolled</b>
Health-related fields	30
Culinary arts	8
Business-related fields	7
Carpentry	7
Electrical Technology	7
Graphic design	5
Network Internet Professional	5
Autobody repair	4
Building maintenance mechanic	4
Criminal Justice	4
Engineering	4
Message therapy	4
Accounting	3
Drafting	3
Machinery	3
Paralegal	3
Plumbing	3
Architecture	2
Video production	2
Cosmetology	1
Early childhood education	1
Fashion design	1
Horticulture	1
HVAC	1
Masonry	1
Music Academy	1
Print Shop	1
Welding	1
None/Did not respond	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>

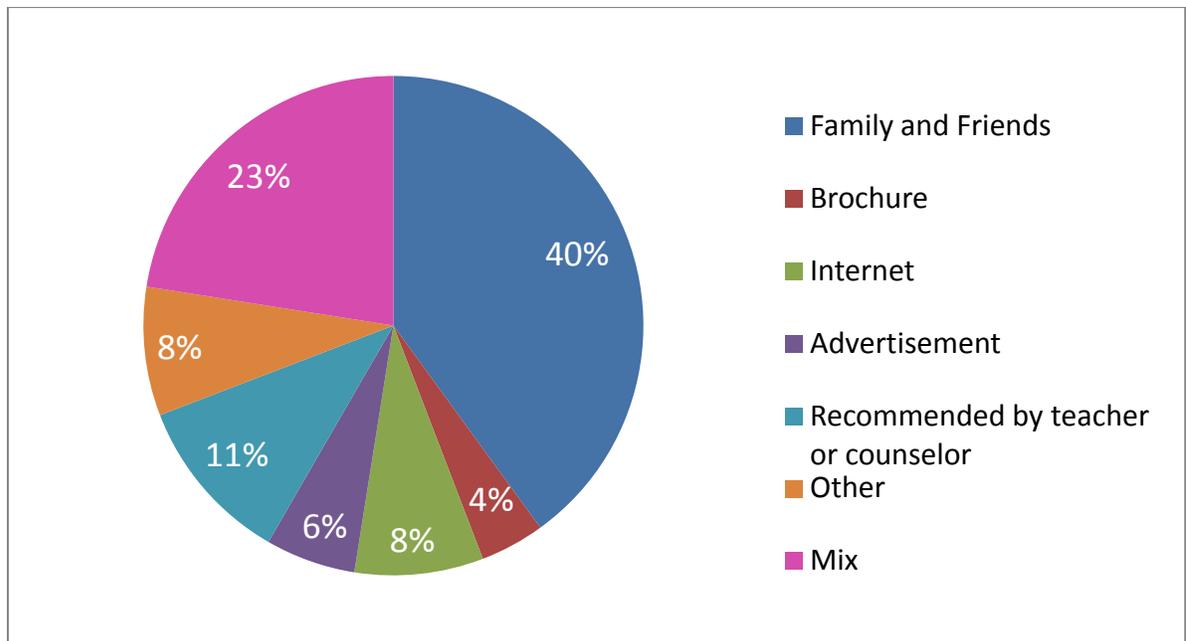


Figure 3: *How did you hear about the school*

The largest percentage (41%) of participants heard about their school from family and friends. This section does not include the participants who had a mix of answers (20%), meaning that some participants circled more than one answer.

When “mix” responses were divided, the number of responses for each section are listed in the chart below. The chart also divides the “advertisement” response into specifically “TV,” “radio,” “newspaper” and “billboard.” It also separates whether the student is recommended by a counselor or by a teacher. These responses are simply tallied, not percentages.

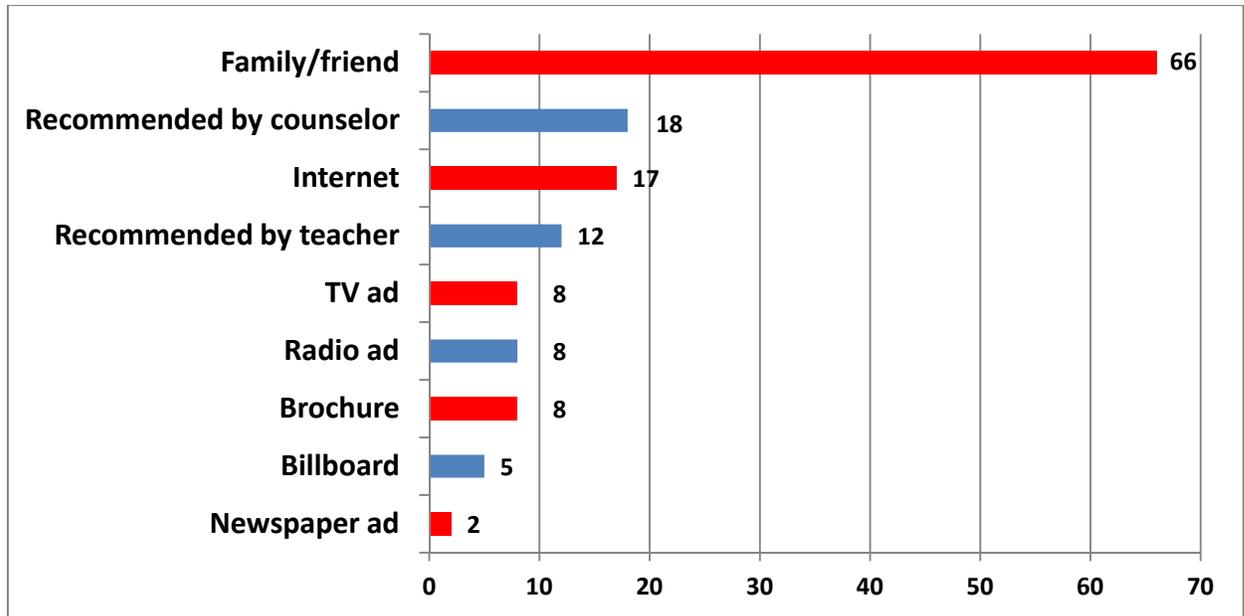


Figure 4: “*Mix*” responses included in totals

The family and friends responses (66) were even more prominent. Radio and TV appear (8) to be the most beneficial channels for reaching students. However, the internet (17) seems to be only slightly less beneficial. In addition, counselors were found to recommend the school to students more than teachers.

Ten participants circled “other” with notable responses including “recommended by work,” “speaker at high school,” “open house/visit” and “a vocational school representative.”

Table 2: *Student satisfaction with school*

The large majority of students were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their school. A very low percentage of students were either “unsatisfied” or “very unsatisfied.” A portion of participants felt “neutral” about their internship opportunities (23%) and their ability to enter their desired field (20%).

**(Read across)**

	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Unsatisfied</b>	<b>Very unsatisfied</b>
<b>Educational experience</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quality of Teachers</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Assistantship/ Internships opportunities</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Ability to enter desired field</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

Some of the survey participants attend vocational high schools and were not asked about monetary costs or certificates offered. Of the 120 surveys, 83 were gathered that included cost and certificates. When the 83 surveys were tabulated, the results were as follows:

Table 3: *Extended Research Regarding Satisfaction*

Of the 83 participants, the largest majority of participants were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the cost (68%) of their school. The same was true for certificates offered (82%). Some students were also neutral about both monetary cost (27%) and certificates (17%).

**(Read across)**

	<b>Very Satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Unsatisfied</b>	<b>Very Unsatisfied</b>
<b>Monetary cost</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Certificates offered</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

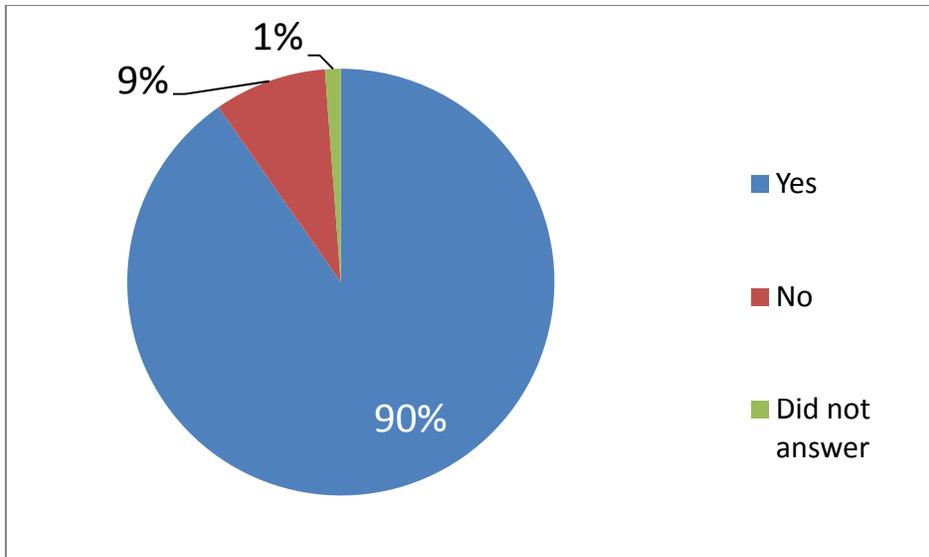


Figure 5: *Would you Recommend to Others*

The overwhelming majority (90%) of students said they would recommend their school to others. Only nine percent said that would not recommend their school.

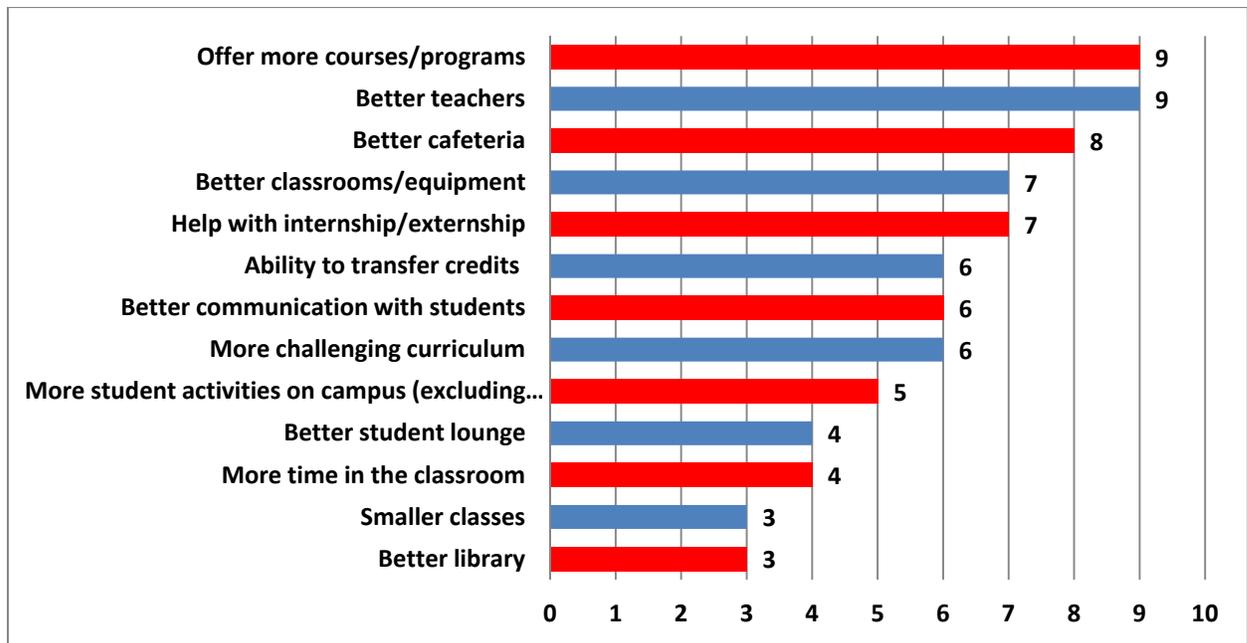


Figure 6: *Two Recommendations to Improve Participants' School*

A variety of suggestions were listed under the recommendation section. The figure displays suggestions that were listed at least three times in the 120 total surveys. These numbers are not percentages. The most common suggestions were for the school to provide more help with internship and externship opportunities (9) and hire better teachers (9).

The quality of teachers seems to be polarized. Questions number five which dealt with students' satisfactions with their school, suggested that the majority of students (81%) were at least satisfied with the quality of teachers, while the open-ended recommendation section suggests some students were not happy with the quality of teachers.

Similarly, 72% of participants said they were at least with their internship opportunities; however, seven people recommended more help.

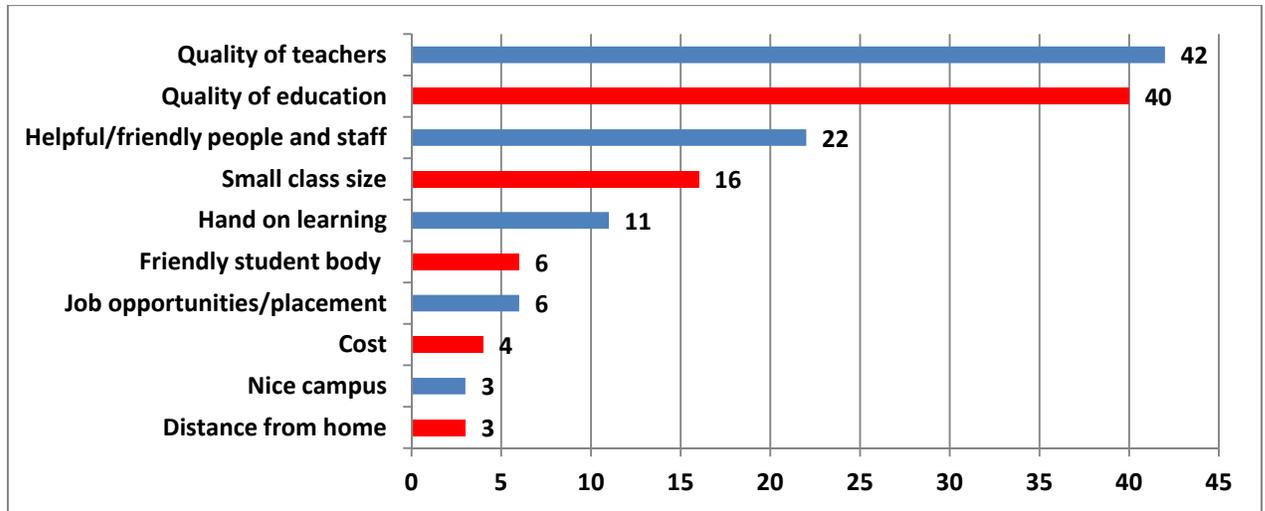


Figure 7: *Two Best Aspects of Participants' School*

Again, the figure displays suggestions that were listed at least three time in the 120 surveys. These numbers are not percentages. The top two responses for the best aspects of their school were quality of teachers (42) and quality of education (40) which nearly doubled the third most-popular response. This data reinforces the high percentages in question five that dealt with students' satisfaction with their school. Other frequent responses included friendly and helpful people in the school (besides teachers) (22), small class size (16) and hands on learning (11).

## H1 Findings

H1 was supported because the qualitative data showed that PR/marketing practitioners use particular techniques and channels to recruit and inform students about their school's vocational programs. Each respondent said their school's enrollment had increased in the last five years partially due to their recruitment techniques.

Each respondent also cited particular factors that they believe contribute to student enrollment in vocational school programs. Some of the factors were "quality of education," "quality of teachers," "perceived job opportunities" and "monetary costs." In addition, respondents were asked about particular techniques and channels they use including targeting parents and using advertisements to inform students about their programs.

Chapter five will further explain the findings for H1 of the research. It will also include the evaluations of the H1 findings and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION**

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what public relations techniques vocational schools use to attract students and why they use certain techniques. The second part of the study attempted to determine how satisfied students were with their vocational school and what students think are the best and worst aspects of their school.

This research concludes that most PR/marketing practitioners believe that the stigma and misconception concerning vocational schools contribute to students not. They also believe people are uninformed about what programs vocational schools offer.

Practitioners need to combat the stigma and misconception of vocational schools by informing potential students, parents and the overall community of the great opportunities their vocational school programs offer. This researcher believes that because of the hard economic times, it may be beneficial to inform these groups of their job placement rate, less expensive tuition costs and quality of education. These aspects would lead to more students enrolling in vocational school programs.

This research also concludes that students are mostly satisfied with their vocational school. Students would recommend their school to others which is beneficial to the schools because most students hear about their school from word-of-mouth (whether that be friends and family or counselors and teachers.)

It would also be beneficial for PR/marketing practitioners to look at student recommendations to make their school better.

#### H1 Findings:

H1 was supported because the data gathered from the intercept surveys show most students are satisfied or very satisfied with specific aspects their school offers. PR/marketing practitioners are also using specific techniques and channels such as advertisements, on the job experiences and getting parents involved to reach potential students. Finally, 90 percent of vocational school students would recommend their school to others. Therefore, research shows that by using specific techniques and channels, more students are likely to attend vocational schools.

While some students are unsatisfied with their school, after evaluating the open-ended questions on the surveys, this researcher believes it may be due to a bad experience at the school. This small portion, while still important, does not speak for the whole sampled population.

#### Conclusion:

As the number of students enrolling in college classes continues to increase while at the same time the unemployment rate has not improved, vocational schools provide their students with a great number of opportunities. Vocational schools prepare their students with hands-on skills that they can take into their perspective field. Many vocational schools are also only two-year programs and are fairly inexpensive compared to many colleges or universities which leads to fewer student loans.

Additionally, many vocational students leave with on-the-job training and help with finding a job. Most students enter fields where employers seek out students rather than students seeking out employment. This can be attributed to vocational schools' high job placement rate.

Like the respondents in my interviews, this researcher agrees that the stigma and misconception of vocational schools and their students must be corrected before the "college-for-all" mentality ends. There should be a better balance between students attending college and students attending vocational schools, so that the needs of America's workforce are met.

#### Evaluation

This research attempted to determine the techniques and channels PR/marketing practitioners use to communicate and recruit students into their programs. Through interviews, this researcher was able to find out why or why not schools use particular techniques and channels and if they are successful.

In addition, intercept surveys set out to find how satisfied vocational students are with their programs, what they believe are the best aspects of their school and what they would recommend to improve their school.

This information would be useful to PR/marketing practitioners at vocational schools who try to make improvements for their school. Using these techniques and channels would increase enrollment in many vocational school programs.

Most students in this research learned about their school by word-of-mouth. This includes hearing from family and friends, counselors or teachers. So while advertisements were found to be successful, students who heard about the school through a direct relationship was much more beneficial for recruitment.

In addition, students listed quality of teachers and quality of education as the best aspects of their school. The majority of students were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” in these areas as well which shows that students, overall, believe they receive a good quality education.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Sampling a larger population would enhance this study. More in-depth interviews and more intercept surveys are recommended as well. This researcher would also encourage future research to ask students about their satisfaction with other aspects of their school, for instance, career guidance. It may provide more insight into how schools can better attract students into their programs.

Doing a content analysis of each school’s print publications might also provide helpful data. This researcher would have liked to know what messages the schools sent through their brochures, fliers and even advertisements.

This researcher would also recommend conducting surveys with a diverse community to find out if the image and stigma of vocational schools and their students are true. While each respondent referred to this negative attitude, this researcher did not find much proof in secondary research that it exists. This researcher thinks it would be beneficial if future researchers attempted to determine the attitudes and opinions of the community towards vocational schools. Research should also extend to high school students since peer pressure was mentioned a few times as effecting enrollment in vocational schools.

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## **APPENDIX A**

Interview questions for the six PR/marketing practitioners were either conducted either over the phone and recorded or were sent via email and returned at a later date. Twelve questions were asked in all. Some questions were two-part or required an explanation.

## Interview Questions

1. What is the name of your vocational school?
2. About how many students are currently enrolled in your programs?
3. How many programs does your school offer to students?
4. What is your job placement rate?
5. Finish this sentence:

*“In the last five years, enrollment in our programs has.. “*

- a. Vastly increased
- b. Slightly increased
- c. Stayed about the same
- d. Slightly decreased
- e. Vastly decreased

- 5a. Why do you think this is so?
6. What do you think are the top three reasons students do not attend vocational schools?
  7. What factors do you think affect student enrollment in vocational programs? (Highlight all that apply)  
Quality of teachers  
Quality of learning  
Perceived job opportunities  
Monetary Cost  
School reputation  
Certifications offered  
Student Interest  
Parental influence  
Apprenticeships/ Internship opportunities  
Geographical location
  8. Does your school work with local high schools to inform high school students about your programs?

9. Does your school partner with local companies to give students on the job experience?

10. Does your school inform parents of high school students about the opportunities of vocational programs? Why or why not?

11. Does your school run any TV, radio or newspaper advertisements?

12. Have you ever conducted research to find out how students find out about your school? Please explain.

## **APPENDIX B**

Surveys included eight questions and were either conducted by this researcher or were conducted by the PR/marketing practitioners at each school.

## Survey Questions

### Demographics

**1. Please circle your gender**

Male

Female

**2. Please circle your age range**

Under 18

18 – 28

29 – 39

40 – 50

51 or over

**3. What program are you currently enrolled in?**

---

**4. How did you hear about this school? Please circle all that apply.**

Family/ friends

TV ad

Radio ad

Newspaper ad

Billboard

Brochure

Internet

Recommended by high school counselor

Recommended by high school teacher

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Satisfaction

**5. Please check each box according to how satisfied you are with the following.**

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
Educational experience					
Teachers/professors at the school					
Career help/guidance					
Assistanceship/ Internships opportunities					
Individual preparation to enter desired field					

**6. Would you recommend this school to others?**

Yes

No

Recommendations

**7. Please list two recommendations on how you think this school could make improvements to better serve your needs.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**8. Please list the two best aspects of your school.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_