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Can the effective use of imagery in marketing publications help create a more diversified campus community at Illinois State University?

Deanna Hamblin

Higher education management has shifted over time; replacing the democratic model with the business model. As a result, universities have incorporated extensive marketing campaigns to target students for recruitment. Unfortunately, the imagery used in marketing publications in these campaigns is not always effective in creating diversified campus communities. This publication will summarize the ethnographic study conducted in the fall of 2012 to assess Illinois State University's use of imagery in their marketing campaigns to first year students. Surveys, observations, and a review of photographs used in publications over the course of Illinois State University's marketing history will be discussed and how they were used to examine the success of imagery used by the university. Following this evaluation, recommendations will be given for the improvement of developing publication materials in marketing the university to potential students.

Note: This paper was completed for the course Anthropology 302, Ethnography, in affiliation with the *Ethnography of the University Initiative*, www.eui.uiuc.edu. Research was conducted in compliance with IRB Protocol #2012-0267 at Illinois State University.

Illinois State University
Sociology and Anthropology
Anthropology 302:Ethnography
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Higher education management has shifted in recent decades from a democratic model to a business model (Clawson and Page 2011). One area in which universities (even public ones) seem most like businesses is in extensive marketing campaigns to target students for recruitment. This paper summarizes an ethnographic study conducted in the fall of 2012 of Illinois State University's use of imagery in their marketing campaigns to first year students. Surveys, observations, and a review of photographs used in publications over the course of Illinois State University's marketing history will be discussed and how they were used to examine the success of imagery used by the university. Following this evaluation, recommendations will be given for the improvement of developing publication materials in marketing the university to potential students. In particular, I argue that the imagery used in marketing publications may not be as effective in creating the diversified campus community university management thinks it is.

Models of Higher Education

Higher education has shifted in recent decades from a democratic model to a business model. (Clawson and Page 2011). Ideally, universities would organize and manage their campuses as well as provide education to their students under the democratic model. In this model, the community (i.e. taxpayers and the state) supports the mission of the university. It is designed and created by the community as a setting for the development of scholarly discourse and the freedom of expression and inquiry. It is inviting to everyone rather than just a select, targeted population and provides ample funding to its students, whether through state funding, funding for lower income students, scholarship opportunities, work study programs, etc.

Unfortunately, over time most public universities have increasingly adopted the business model because of growing economic constraints and competition for prospective students. In this model, university missions are no longer governed by a community centered approach. Instead universities sacrifice some of their mission and community goals by employing business practices to market the university to potentials students in order to secure funding. The university employs CEO like directors that control and manage the university from the top down. Staff is employed to facilitate the design of an ideal education that will coincide with large corporate donor needs and then market these programs to prospective students. Students and parents then become the customers in the supply and demand chain. In this model, the university targets affluent or other specific demographic groups to ensure funding for the university.

The Business Model

Clawson and Page (2011) noted that in the sixties operating a university like a business would have been unheard of, the primary mission for institutions of higher education were simply to educate students and most colleges and universities followed the faculty governance

model. However, this has changed dramatically, and although the authors asserted that not all colleges or universities follow the same model, the business model is most definitely the dominant one used today (Clawson and Page 2011). This model includes the following requirements in order for the university to be seen as profitable: self-funded, faculty rewards, and student recruitment, all for the purpose of raising funds to stay self sufficient (Clawson and Page 2011).

Illinois State University is a large, public university, and over the past decade has had to shift toward a more business model to compete with regional competitors for student enrollment. Dr. Rosenthal, when speaking with students in our class discussion, indicated that the use of the business model in higher education is in part due to the progressive decline in state funding and although Illinois State University has spent far less in marketing the university in the past, in order to remain self sufficient, it will have to increase its efforts in the next few years. Additionally, the tension between accessibility and excellence in enrolling new students will become more of an issue for the university. In the past, our university has been selective in admitting students with higher ACT and GPA scores, but with the fierce competition, Illinois State University might have to be less selective in their admissions process.

It comes as no surprise, then, that there are many similarities to the university that are recognizable in the business environment, yet one is strikingly familiar: the consumer. Clawson and Page (2011) suggested that students can be seen as consumers because they influence the development of the university, whether that is improvements and features of the campus or programs offered. Institutions of higher learning compete for their choices much like in the business world (Clawson and Page 2011). Therefore, those with deeper pockets are more

attractive for recruitment, and unfortunately those that rely heavily on financial aid are not (Clawson and Page 2011).

Under the business model perhaps students also become products. Large fortune 500 companies donate to colleges and universities, in return they gain access to desirable interns and recent graduates available for hire. This establishes a supply and demand mentality between corporations and institutions of higher education that may be compelled to serve business interests rather than democratic ideals. Just as colleges or universities compete for high performing students with financial means, they also compete for the funds generously donated by these companies. In return, university programs are then tailored toward the companies' needs and the university has the responsibility of using these programs to supply qualified professionals, or products.

In keeping with the philosophy of the business model, it is important to then consider how institutions of higher education use marketing and other business management tools to recruit and retain students. Chris Lalla (2008) reviewed the methods used by UIUC for recruitment and retention of diverse students and found that they had several successful strategies. The first was to distribute information and advertise the university and its programs (Lalla 2008). These included publications aimed at junior and senior high school students (Lalla 2008). Although he stated these publications did not directly target diverse students in the brochures, aspects that might be appealing to diverse students were described including opportunities to join diverse organizations that were diverse and culturally diverse housing. He also discovered that the university sponsors events like the "Orange and Blue Days" that allows prospective students who would not otherwise be able to visit the campus to do so by providing free transportation to and from campus (Lalla 2008). High school presentations and mailings also

help give students of diverse backgrounds information about the university. These students are encouraged to attend cultural events on campus to help foster relationships with other culturally diverse students (Lalla 2008). Underrepresented students benefit from these recruitment methods and that also helps retain these students once enrolled at the university.

Although Illinois State University may be a strong proponent of using a democratic model (as suggested in their mission statement), their practices are more in line with the business model. For instance, Illinois State University, as other universities across the United States, commonly purchases lists of students with high ACT scores and high grade point averages to target for their recruitment efforts. They also invest heavily in admissions presentations, programs, and marketing publications to catch specific demographic groups to meet diversity goals. They conduct ROIs (Return On Investment) studies to measure whether their recruitment expenditures actually result in increased enrollments. (Although none have been conducted since 2004 leaving the university uncertain of whether they are truly reaching their targeted audience). Illinois State University has spent far less than other universities in the region on recruitment and promotion because until recently has not had to compete as fiercely for students (Jonathan Rosenthal, personal communication).

Provided with this background, I set out to examine recruitment and admissions at Illinois State University and, in particular, to pay close attention to the imagery (both of the campus and individual students or groups of students) used in recruitment materials and presentation. Although my results are partial and preliminary, I found that the university is quite disconnected from their results of their financial investment, despite having a brand and identity standards. I found the actual process of developing and choosing imagery used in marketing publications to

be a disorganized process, overly reliant on one department (in fact, just one designer) with no unified direction or mission.

Diversity in the University

The ideal higher education environment at Illinois State University has been summarized in the following university mission statement:

> We at Illinois State University work as a diverse community of scholars with a commitment to fostering a small-college atmosphere with large-university opportunities. We promote the highest academic standards in our teaching, scholarship, public service and the connections we build among them. We devote all of our resources and energies to creating the most supportive and productive community possible to serve the citizens of Illinois and beyond (Illinois State University 2012b).

The university has made progress in the 2012 fiscal year toward meeting its first Educating Illinois mission goal, "Illinois State University will position students to excel in a globally competitive, culturally diverse, technological and changing environment" (Board of Trustees 2012). This progress includes increased funding for students, increased retention rates, and increased minority enrollment at the university (Board of Trustees 2012). Past progress has included increasing program support for transfer and underrepresented students and designing programs to target underrepresented groups (Board of Trustees 2011, 2010).

Still, is a diverse community being created? According to quantitative data, both university enrollment goals and mission goals have been met. The number of students for ethnic diversity is sufficient and the university is satisfied with the amount of incoming academically qualified students to add to our campus community (Illinois State University 2012, Jonathan Rosenthal personal correspondence). Illinois State University clearly promotes its "diverse community of scholars," but the language of the Illinois State University's mission statement is

vague when it comes to new students and the campus community as a whole (Illinois State University 2012b). The higher education initiative, Educating Illinois, encourages institutions to set long range goals for their campus communities; is diversity one of them for Illinois State University? The Education Illinois goal aspires to help "students to **excel in** a globally competitive, **culturally diverse**, technological and changing **environment**" (Board of Trustees 2012). This goal is unclear. Does the university want students to excel in a cultural diverse environment on campus or once they graduate and are in the workforce? Wouldn't a diverse campus community allow students to do both? Further, the mission statement promotes, "We devote all of our resources and energies to creating the most **supportive** and **productive** community," yet this is not the same thing as a diverse community (Illinois State University 2012b). With this level of ambiguity, it comes as no surprise then that my ethnographic study revealed the possibility that our university might not have a diverse campus community.

According to university statistics, our university campus community is comprised of 20,762 students with the majority of those students being white females, with the average age of students in the 20-24 age range (Illinois State University 2012a). This university statistic is virtually identical to the state of Illinois's 2011 demographic statistics (US Dept of Commerce 2012). All racial groups are represented at the university with black or African American students comprising the majority of racial/ethnic variety on campus. Most undergraduate students (61%) have been identified as being recruited from the Chicago and surrounding areas. Non-traditional students (veterans, career changers, and older returning students) are a significant size of our campus community as well. A review of the past ten years of demographic data compiled for incoming students has show up and down trends but looks very similar to the 2012 school year; these statistics correspond to state statistics: mostly, white females. Could

imagery influence a change in the diversity of the population on Illinois State University's campus?

What is Diversity?

What is Diversity? Is it just racial/ethnicity representation? Is it being able to say that there is a fair amount of mixing of females and males, blacks to whites, freshman to transfer students? The University of Tennessee's mission statement includes the following definition:

> Diversity is a commitment to recognizing and appreciating the variety of characteristics that make individuals unique in an atmosphere that promotes and celebrates individual and collective achievement. (Diversity Committee 2003).

A diverse campus would include: the young, the old, parents (both single and not) their children, traditional high school graduates entering as freshmen, non-traditional students, transfer students from other four year institutions and from community colleges, retirees, veterans, and career changers. Characteristics could also include: cognitive style, culture, disability, economic background, education, ethnicity, gender identity, geographic background, religious beliefs and sexual orientation (Diversity Committee 2003). It would include people of various backgrounds and circumstances. Diversity, by definition encompasses variety - a variety of individuals and perspectives. A diverse campus is not only, or even mainly, about the value in representation, but in the value of active interaction and collaboration.

This definition is not a part of the university's mission or Educating Illinois Higher Education goals. But one stated priority was "**upholding the <u>value</u> of diversity** with it endeavors to create an **inclusive** community where <u>all students, staff, and faculty</u> are active participants in a global society characterized by teamwork, respect for differences, civic

engagement, and educational goals which celebrate diversity" (Illinois State University 2012b). From this, it is apparent that the university does want a diversified campus community; one that is inclusive and has interaction between participants.

Imagery and Marketing

Given this priority of creating a varied and inclusive environment set by the university, I wanted to examine the imagery that was used in marketing publications to determine if these materials were reflecting our diversity and promoting this to a wide audience. Most recruitment materials contain specific imagery aimed at influencing prospective students. Market Research Kamleitner (2011) reveals just how important imagery is in influencing consumer choice; images engender a sense of ownership in individuals. Processing of imagery is important in decision-making. When images are processed with the psychological sense of ownership, individuals are more likely to buy into a particular product (Kamleitner 2011). When people long for something, vivid and strong content based imagery play a strong role in creating a sense of ownership. If people can see themselves owning a product or experience, in the case of higher education, then vivid imagery has a profound effect (Kamleitner 2011).

There are two types of marketing strategies employed by universities for prospective students: mass marketing (where differences between students are ignored) or target marketing (where differences between students are recognized) (Lewison and Hawes 2007). Targeted marketing strategies are even more effective if coupled with multiple "marketing channels of distribution" (Lewison and Hawes 2007:18). According to Jonathan Rosenthal, Associate Dean College of Arts and Sciences Illinois State University and former director of Illinois State University's Enrollment Management Services, a $150,000 grant given to the university was

going to be used toward marketing the university in a multi-venture (billboards, cable access, etc). These efforts are most effective (Pettit 2005)

Pettit (2005) insisted that businesses spend less time and money in measuring whether their marketing campaigns are successful as they do on the marketing campaigns themselves. His article outlined the four types of assessment (descriptive, interpretation, explanation, and prediction) called the Longwoods International Quadrant Map (LQ) used in determining the quality and impact of marketing campaigns (Pettit 2005). Through this analysis companies and organizations can optimize and enhance their accountability. In this way, they can gauge their effectiveness, have creative impact, be multi-dimensional, dynamic, and be varied in their approaches. In using a holistic approach, organizations can better understand their customers or as with higher education – their prospective students (Pettit 2005). Instead of viewing marketing as merely a static process, companies and organizations can benefit by being more thorough and bolder in their attempt to influence consumer decisions. Explanation methods, like ROI (return on investments) and similar strategies are very important to use in establishing an adequate feedback loop, where one aspect reflects and then influences another (Pettit 2005). This is an important component of marketing to consider when examining the university because it brings into question what is being done in terms of marketing to gauge its effectiveness and what strategies can be implemented in order to make it better.

Successful imagery in marketing campaigns should be vivid and rich in content in order to influence its audience. But does that mean that all images are okay? Homosexual imagery, especially male to male images, is not successful in influencing consumers (Hooten 2009). In fact, consumers are put off by the use of homosexual imagery in advertisements and this is most likely the case for prospective students as well. Not everyone can identify with the homosexual

community and therefore cannot develop a strong sense of ownership or relating to the product (i.e. the university). It is important to keep in mind that not all images are effective in reaching a wide audience.

The admissions office itself plays a major role in the presentation of the university and first impressions are everything (Sundar Kumarasamy 2012). Imagery, however, is definitely an aspect in that first impression. Although much of the admissions and recruitment efforts have moved online, viewbooks (publications circulated by universities about specific programs, organizations, etc and include imagery of the campus community to prospective students) are still important. In 2007, Sundar Kumarasamy (2012) had the entire brand image of his private Catholic college in Dayton, Ohio revamped by the Philadelphia based marketing firm, 160over90. It had "fresh and edgy" imagery that depicted the university in a new, "more appealing" way (Kumarassamy 2012:3). He cited that the emphasis on viewbooks was extremely important in broadening the university's pool of students (Kumarassamy 2012).

Is broadening the university's enrollment pool important? According to Enache and Brodsky (2011) this is incredibly important because in order to reach the "Y" generation (young students born after 1990) institutions of higher learning need to use innovative social marketing innovative strategies to achieve their educational marketing goals. These students have very different expectations of what they hope to gain from an education than previous generations (Enache and Brodsky 2011). They conducted two studies with standardized, quantitative surveys in the Czech Republic and Romania on two university campuses to determine (among other things) how students are getting their information about the universities (Enache and Brodsky 2011). What they discovered is that 40.4% of students are getting their information from websites while only 22.0% are getting their information from visits to the university (Enache and

Brodsky 2011). I asked about the success of campus visits through email interviews with admissions counselors here on campus and discovered campus visits were a strong component of recruitment. Counselors were certain that once students were able to get to campus, it would seal the deal in their decision. But marketing strategies that include distributing information to prospective students, including in online resources, might be more effective (Enache and Brodsky 2011).

What about students that do not come to visit? If students are feeling the economic crunch like the rest of the nation, globe, then it would be more practical to research universities online before investing in campus visits. Graduate students, here in Illinois State University's Anthropology department, took a recent trip to visit campuses in Florida to inquire about PhD programs. This trip cost approximately 800$ roundtrip each (flight, car rental, lodging and food). Prospective students simply might not have this extra income to make campus visits; multiple visits would be very expensive. It would make sense that generation Y, one that is both a product of our economic and technological age would opt to penny-pinch by using the web. Contrary to the Admission Department's philosophy, campus visits may not be an effective strategy in recruitment.

"Among the greatest challenges to successfully marketing higher education is the inherently intangible nature of the very thing that is being marketed," Eric Anctil (2008). The only real tangible item from a higher education experience is the diploma given upon graduation (Eric Anctil 2008). How then do universities market themselves when the qualities that they possess are not something that students can easily see? Marketing the university with creative imagery and a clear image or brand becomes all that more important in resolving this issue. University images, Anctil (2008) proposed, have a huge impact on the decision-making of

prospective students with respect to enrollment. It is not necessary for the university to paint to entire picture for prospective students, however, characteristics about the university like alumni employment rates, academic programs, cost, campus life etc are extremely influential (Anctil 2008).

Increased sales of Apple computers after the success of a singular product, the Apple ipod, is indicative of a phenomenon in marketing called the halo effect (Anctil 2008). If universities can produce and present images that represent one or two of the main qualities that make the university unique or attractive to prospective audiences, students will most likely assume that the rest of the qualities are just as attractive. The development of a brand is just as important. In fact, the amount of marketing budget that is allotted for the branding of the university, is likely to reflect its success; Nike and other brand names are not accidental – the companies invested heavily into them initially (Anctil 2008). Anctil (2008) noted too, that once the brand is successful, it can carry a university's marketing for years. An initial investment goes a long way.

Anctil (2008) reviewed the sevens steps in successfully marketing a university proposed by Sevier. First, the university should identify their characteristics that prospective students want and expect. Second, conduct studies to determine whether or not prospective students think that the university can supply what they want or expect. Third, look at the gaps between the two. Fourth, develop a strategic plan that encompasses both what the university wants to accomplish and how to implement the changes. Fifth, prioritize your efforts to select targeted audiences. Sixth, develop a successful brand strategy. And finally, continually test and refine this marketing strategy. This important process could take several months and the benefits may not be evident right away. It takes time. Those universities that continually rework their identity standards and

branding every few years have the least success in marketing their institutions. The money invested in branding is especially important in marketing the university and certainly worth the expense because as a brand increases in value, so does the customer response. (Schultz and Barnes 1999). Illinois State University could reach a wider audience if it used the media and circulated successful marketing publications.

Jonathan Rosenthal claimed we are bombarded with imagery in every form of media – so how will our university stand out? Using effective imagery might be a strategy the university could employ. But is successful imagery even created on our campus? Does it reflect diversity or an inclusive, diverse campus community?

Ethnographic Research Methods

Assessment and Evaluation

Due to the important role imagery plays in marketing the university I wanted to assess the measures that Illinois State University takes in promoting the university to prospective students. An ethnographic study provided crucial qualitative data that offered insight into practices and to determining their effectiveness. I conducted an ethnographic study in the Business School Atrium asking students what deciding factors contributed to their choice to attend Illinois State University. I investigated Illinois State University's Flicker account stock images that are used in marketing publications and compared them to marketing publications used in the past. I conducted email interviews with a counselor in the Department of Admissions, Department Directors, the Marketing Department, and an outside consulting firm. I also conducted two ethnographic observations: one of a marketing photo shoot at the School of Business atrium and

at an Admissions presentation to visiting prospective students. Finally, I conducted an ethnographic study of a single Department of Admissions' recruitment mailer designed by the Marketing Department to understand student response to the selection of imagery.

Branding and Market Strategy

The Director of Marketing at Illinois State University informed me that the university has been interested in a brand identity since the 1980s and the first efforts were made then to "standardize Illinois State University's brand and message, both for the university as a whole and for athletics" (personal correspondence 2012). It was not until the 1990s that the Reggie Redbird logo was created to enhance the marketing campaign for the university; this was also the time that the current branding: State Your Passion was instituted. The current identity standards are created and maintained by the University Marketing and Communications, in particular one executive and three assistant directors who meet quarterly. But the last studies conducted to understand the perception of Illinois State University were back in the 1990s. He noted, the university is *considering* a new study that would take place over the next two years to assess the brand that is in use today to market the university. It would be after this study that the university considered making recommendations for any changes. Waiting for twenty years to assess whether the current brand and identity standards were effective and how the public perceived the university seems too long. What other options are there for university marketing?

AO, founder of Converge, a consulting firm in Chicago that assists higher education institutions with their digital communication goals, offers her fifteen year experience in the field to provide universities like University of Michigan, Northwestern, DePaul, Teachers College at Columbia University, Clarke University, and San Francisco State University with the expertise to

develop strategies in their individualized marketing goals. Whether it is in increasing alumni donations and sponsorship, or completely reinventing university brand images she works with universities to develop a set of goals and then trains employees to set the process in motion. She was willing to be a part of any solution Illinois State University might be interested in and offered three suggestions to universities that are considering marketing changes: understand the goal of publications and know the audience that the publications are intended for, define the brand that the university is using, and then know what images are best to use for this purpose. If this expert in marketing consultation was interested in imagery and how it correlated to the audience it was intended for, then clearly imagery has influential power in promoting the university.

The presenter of the admissions presentations given to prospective students meticulously addressed common concerns like safety, transportation, housing, financing, etc and also pitched to us the branded State Your Passion theme. The presenter also conveyed just how Illinois State University provided the opportunity for academic excellence, was a great economic investment, could provide a superior outcome versus other similar institutions, and provided amble opportunities for civic and campus engagement. The university message is clear, so the real dilemma is not in the branding, but in the imagery used in the publications. There is an identifiable disconnect between the university and its audience. With a clear marketing message, the university is accomplishing its goals, certainly in numbers, but what if it could be diversifying its campus community in ways that it has not considered.

How is the imagery used in publications created?

Most of the problem lies in the process of how the publications are designed. I was able to observe a photo shoot for publication for the School of Business with the university graphic designer, her intern, and the university photographer. The shoot had two subjects, one was a young, blond, fair skinned young woman who was contacted from the information that she gave at the free t-shirt booth and the other was her associate she had recently had a meeting with. They both were assumed to be from the School of Business, but after further inquiry when the subjects arrived in the atrium, it was discovered they both were from an entirely different program. After some disconcerting looks were exchanged, this was dismissed as irrelevant. The shoot was not planned very well and evidence of this was in the fact that neither the graphic designer nor her intern brought any of the necessary props for the shots that were being taken. There were no books, no coffee cups, nothing that would indicate that they were students conversing in the atrium. They improvised by asking the café for two empty coffee cups. The photographer took her 50-100 shots and the shoot finished.

They did not intend to take any more photographs. This was a staged shot with only two subjects that completely disregarded the environment that was an essential part of the School of Business. None of the real students at the School of Business were approached to participate, none of the architecture or vibrant scenery was recorded, and the representation of the School of Business seemed to be lacking. I realized at this point that the graphic designer was part of a publication process that was disorganized and lacked collaboration. What would have been better would have been for the School of Business to have had representatives meet the graphic designer at the photo shoot to provide input as to which direction they would have liked to have gone; they could have even provided students to the graphic designer to use as subjects in the shoot. Instead, the clients or departments that use the marketing services for their publications

are overly reliant on the graphic designer to make all of the decisions for them. While my impression of her was that she was a creative and responsible individual, this seemed like a lot to place on one individual's shoulders.

I reviewed the Illinois State University's flicker account's array of images that are used in marketing publications. Browsing through the different images that the photographer took at various events held at the university (including Passages, Preview, sporting events, sports events, and other activities sponsored by different student organizations) it was apparent that the photographer does capture a wide range of images when covering these events. The opportunity for image variety is certainly a possibility. Why do the marketing publications put out by the university reuse the same type of images and exclude some of the great shots in the account?

The university photographer informed me that she chooses the shots based on composition and tries to take anywhere from fifty to one hundred pictures at any one event that she is covering with either a Nikon D300 or D7000 for quality shots. She will take about the same or more at photo shoots that are commissioned by various departments working with the marketing department to design publications as well. She has been employed with the university for five years and confided that she only takes the photographs, she has no final say in which images are chosen for publication. In fact, she only edits the ones that are truly "bad shots with closed eyes, crazy expressions, out of focus or missed exposures, the rest of the images go into our system" (personal correspondence). She added that a great shot has "good interaction between the subjects, and has good lighting and color" (personal correspondence). Given this elaborate process for a great shot, why does the marketing department then choose similar images for publication with so many options available to represent the university? Most of the subjects are white and have a preppy appearance in publications, when the flicker account clearly

reflects more diversified subjects to draw from. This was confusing; if she felt this way about made a great shot, then how do the thousands of images in the university's flicker account remain out of publication?

Perhaps the lack of use of these other images is because the marketing department might not have a lot of participation from students who are willing to be subjects for photo shoots. But upon informally speaking to the marketing graphic designer I realized that maybe it was the methods used to get their subjects that was part of the problem. She mentioned that in order to get her subjects, she sets up a booth once a year on the quad during the day and hands out free t-shirts in exchange for contact information for individuals willing to participate. This was a great way to get contact information, but would it necessarily offer a wide variety of individuals? The students who only take classes, only take classes on other days than when she sets up to the booth, or take classes in other sections of the university and never pass through that location are automatically excluded as potential subjects. This does not seem to be the best way to have a wide variety of individuals in marketing publications.

Does the imagery reflect diversity and inclusivity?

Illinois State University promotes three aspects of the university: Illinois State University is a large school with a small school feel, it possesses quality programs, and located in an excellent community (Bloomington/Normal) (Admissions counselor personal correspondence). Marketing publications all center on this and the university branding campaign: State Your Passion. The four pillars of excellence the university has set: academics, value, outcomes, and social fit, are also clearly depicted in marketing publications sent to prospective students. When an admissions counselor was asked what his impression of the publications that are currently in

use, he replied that they showed “diversity in both the students and activities.” But when asked what he would change if anything, his response was: “more variety.” This opinion revealed even an insider into the admissions process noticed that the publications are repetitive and lack variety. The Dean of Student Affairs, Janet Anderson, shared the same concern (Anderson 2012 personal correspondence)

I signed up on the Admissions Department’s website to receive their marketing publications geared toward prospective students. In addition to receiving publications in the mail, I also visited the Admissions Department to collect publications that would be available to visiting prospective students and their families including materials that were geared toward various departments on campus. I then compared the imagery in these publications to marketing publications that were sent to prospective students archived in the Illinois State University’s archival collection at both the Milner Library and what little I could find at the University Archives. I then compared the publications to one another and found one unsettling difference.

In the 1960s images included students in pristine dorm rooms studying, picturesque views of the campus, and various students engaged in civic and academic activities. While publications in more recent years include the same subject matter, the images are used strikingly different. The 1960s publications, and subsequent years’ publications, have included students that represented the diverse population on campus, including the ethnic diversity, and a real sense of variety; a component of our campus community that was evident well before its time on other college campuses across the United States. Publications more recently do have diversity, but it appears that the same images are used over and over again. In fact, when visiting Illinois State University official, John Rosenthal, participated in a class discussion he confided that one student of Indian decent on campus was approached and chosen for a large number of photo

shoots to depict ethnic diversity on campus. This is disappointing given the use of a variety of students in the past to represent the diversity on campus and it raised a question of why this practice is used in marketing Illinois State University.

The population at the School of Business is not represented in the photographs that were taken at the photo shoot either. All of the students in the building would have been perfect candidates to capture real Business students; the floors had an array of students coming and going, sitting in foyers, conversing, and studying. One in particular I spoke with informed me that he traveled an hour and a half each way to attend school three days a week and another told me that he was the first in his family to have ever attended college. What amazing students that were excluded from representing the School of Business.

Each of the students overwhelmingly reported similar reasons for their choice in the School of Business at Illinois State University, one in particular stood out: close to home. This is striking that the majority of them chose “close to home” as a reason. If the university is marketing nationwide, then why did all of the students say that staying in Illinois was important to them? Does the university have that small of a pool of prospective students; only those in Illinois? While this is clearly not representative of the entire student body pursuing degrees at the School of Business it still might be an indication that the university needs to reach a wider audience.

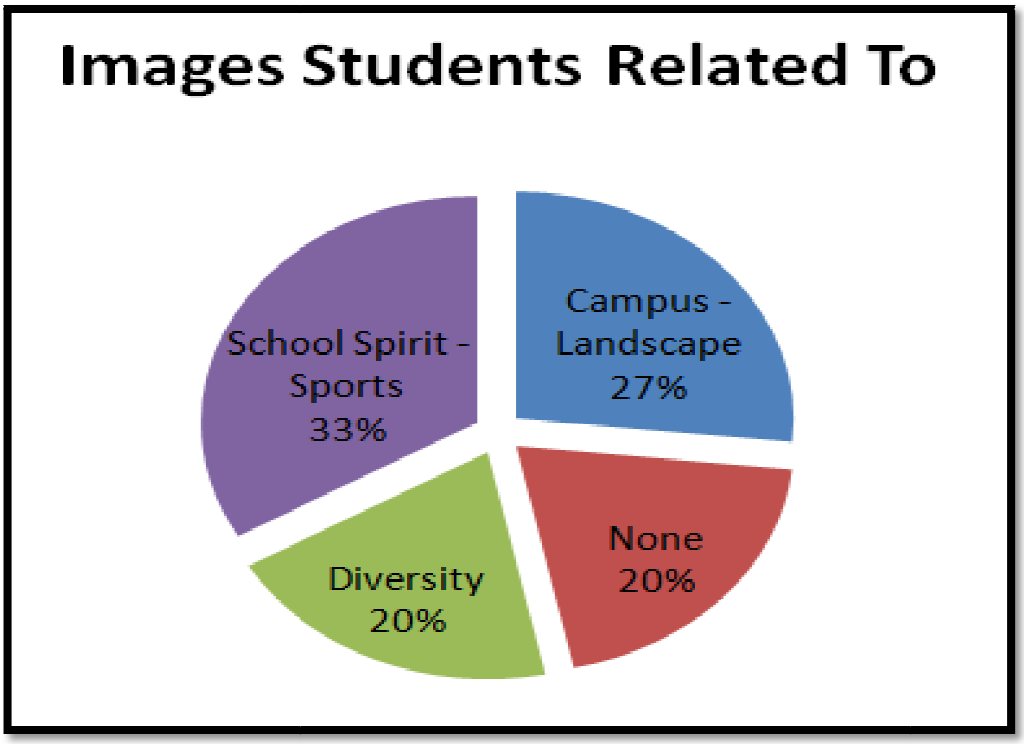
The first impression the university was sending provided information about why the selection pool for prospective students is so seemingly small. The elaborate survey of thirty random students on campus about their opinions regarding one of the Admissions Department marketing mailers was insightful.

In the survey, I first asked the students, what their first impression of the mailer was, if they could summarize it in two words. Some of the responses included:

> Eye catching, ISU is a fun place, unified, red, communal, friendly and warm, big bird, annoyance, athletics, varied environments, fun opportunities, looks good, drawn to the campus image, sports, social life, fun, school spirit, friendly, clubs and involvement, nice school, tradition, pretty campus, a lot of red, and diversity.

Then, I asked the students to tell me an image that they could identify with the most. The majority of the students involved in bands, cheerleading or sports (whether participants or spectators) chose the pictures with the sports fans or cheerleaders. This was very much expected. Other students, who often hesitated in choosing the longest, finally chose the nature scene with the campus. Clearly this was an indication that they were not immediately able to identify with any of the other images. Some students openly admitted that there wasn't a single image that

they could relate to. And finally the black or African American students I conversed with told me that they could identify with the two women of color, but all complained about the size of the image in proportion to the other images that diversity was given. One student offered a solution, it didn't even matter if the people in the picture were black, let them be Asian or even mix some into the other images. He was clearly asking for a stronger variety of images.



The images that are used in the marketing materials do not necessarily reflect or advertise the diversified campus we have or are trying to promote. With the marketing publication process as it stands, maybe these materials are reaching potential students but they cannot identify with them (much like the students I spoke to found difficulty in). If they cannot identify with the images in the marketing materials, then they stop considering our institution because they cannot see themselves owning an experience here on our campus.

Conclusions

The brief survey of student perspectives, albeit unrepresentative, leads me to some conclusions supported by other data. First, Illinois State University uses marketing publications to attract potential students to add to a student body that encompasses their standards of excellence. These students hopefully provide diversity or variety to the campus community, are well rounded and full of potential. Unfortunately, after reviewing multiple marketing publications circulated by the university used in recruitment, all have similar choices in imagery (sporty, preppy, and school spirit orientated). It appears that the university is inadvertently creating and maintaining social boundaries that limit their selection of potential students to help shape or add to this campus community. The first step in preventing these boundaries is identifying the problem and changing the process to avoid them in the future (Swanson 2004). This short qualitative study identified a symptom of a larger problem that needs to be addressed: there is a disconnect between the imagery used in recruitment and the real people it is trying to reach. In having this disconnect, a diverse, inclusive campus community with active interaction and collaboration is out of our reach.

Recommendations to the University

Unfortunately, with the fierce competition for students in higher education, Illinois State University will most likely continue to use the business model to manage the university. If so, they can use business strategies and marketing tools effectively in service of higher goals. Some of the recommendations I have for the university should be considered. First, an outside consulting firm like Coverge Consulting in Chicago would be ideal. In this way the university

could work with an outside veteran in marketing our institution. As I discovered earlier in my study, it is not as if the university has little direction in brand and identity standards, it is simply that they are uncertain of the level of diversity of their captured audience and how well the imagery used in marketing publications correlates to the audience they are truly trying to reach. Hiring a consulting firm to assess how the university can better reach wider audiences across the United States would be a great investment. They could work with the university to host focus groups, ROI studies, trial publication goals, and train employees involved in marketing the university. This involvement of an outside consulting firm, if only initially, could help the university compete for students nationwide.

Second, I would suggest that images that are stored in the Flicker account need to be used. There are wonderful images of the campus, the community, and students engaged in their college experience, yet the same type of images are used over and over again. Perhaps it would be better to have a team of individuals in the marketing department that were in charge of the decision-making in creating marketing materials in university recruitment in order to have a more collaborative effort rather than leaving it to one individual. Janet Peterson, Dean of Student Affairs, even commented that as a client, her department usually leaves the choice of imagery to the graphic designer who can choose from her stock. While the graphic designer's expertise is appreciated, it would seem that having a team of individuals would make the process that much more organized and fluid. Another suggestion would be to set up an account where students could upload pictures of their own; the marketing department could offer incentives for the perfect shot or a free t-shirt to the individual student whose image was chosen for publication. The potential for representing and in turn attracting a more diverse student body is there, the images just need to be utilized.

Finally, hosting events and informational sessions seems to be a better approach than handing out t-shirts in exchange for contact information. In this way, relationships can be forged between the administration and students. A database could even be created that stored profile shots of various students, along with their contact information, who were willing to be subjects for publications that is then sorted by school or department. In this way, when photo shoots are prepared, students can be coordinated for the shoot. Different departments and schools could also compile their own lists of students that interested. This would provide a great volunteer experience for students to add to their resume as well as provide amble variety for the marketing department to use in publications.

Closing Thoughts

Right now the Illinois State University is getting what it pays for, numbers, but it could have a more diverse, inclusive campus community if it used images in marketing the university that reached a wider audience. It is unsettling to think of all the potential scholars our university has driven to another institution simply because they could not see themselves a part of ours.

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