

1-1-2006

Marketing the BSW Program A Blend of Creativity, Ideas and Resources

Barbara W. Shank

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, BWSHANK@stthomas.edu

Serene B. Thornton

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, sbthornton@stthomas.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://ir.stthomas.edu/ssw_pub



Part of the [Clinical and Medical Social Work Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shank, Barbara W. and Thornton, Serene B., "Marketing the BSW Program A Blend of Creativity, Ideas and Resources" (2006). *Social Work Faculty Publications*. Paper 15.

http://ir.stthomas.edu/ssw_pub/15

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Work at UST Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Work Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UST Research Online. For more information, please contact libroadmin@stthomas.edu.

Marketing the BSW Program: A Blend of Creativity, Ideas and Resources (2006) BPD Update, Winter.

Barbara W. Shank, Guest Editor, Dean and Serene B. Thornton, BSW Program Director, College of St. Catherine – University of St. Thomas, School of Social Work

During the last few years, recruitment under the rubric of marketing has become a major topic of conversation for BSW program faculty as competitive realities have emerged. Historically, faculty have expected that the College or University Office of Admission would handle all marketing and recruitment for undergraduate students and even graduate student admission in some institutions. Students would select an institution, complete their liberal arts program, declare their major and ‘appear’ in the classroom. Faculty defined their academic role as teaching, scholarship and service to the institution, school and profession. They did not expect, and in fact many have resisted, being actively engaged in recruitment and marketing efforts.

Expectations have changed! The Office of Admission acknowledges that they spend most of their time recruiting traditional age high school seniors and marketing high volume majors. They state that they do not have the staff numbers, expertise or interest to spend their time recruiting for programs with special appeal to transfer students or non-traditional students. The college-university budget is fueled by four year full-time first year students. BSW faculty must come to realize that it is critical for all faculty to actively participate in marketing and recruitment

efforts, if their social work major is going to remain consistently strong and viable and the program is to maintain healthy class sizes.

In spring 2004, we surveyed our junior majors to get a better feel for how students were making ‘major’ or career decisions prior to enrollment or once they were enrolled. They wanted to develop a more focused approach for recruiting and design targeted marketing strategies. The survey asked how students learned about social work as a profession generally and the social work major specifically. The majority of students indicated that they learned about social work in high school or from their roommates once on campus. This information was extremely useful in supporting our development of targeted strategies for high school students and on campus marketing activities.

So, if you must market, where do you begin? What are your marketing goals? Are they related to recruitment, retention, revenue generation, or fundraising? Your marketing goals will direct your activities and provide direction for developing your strategic marketing plan. Developing a strategic marketing plan is critical. The first step is completing a comprehensive systems analysis. Based on this analysis, a marketing plan would include several areas such as the program history, mission, goals and objectives, enrollment history, pricing, demand analysis, and competitive analysis. A SWOT Analysis of the program (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) provides more data for analysis. Marketing objectives and strategies are identified, positioning considered and a marketing mix of tools developed. Identification of a communications calendar is useful to

keep marketing efforts on track and identify individuals or groups responsible for implementation.

A marketing plan will identify a marketing mix of tools, a marketing budget and assigned execution responsibilities for consideration. Although we recognize that available budget, personnel and institutional support are factors that affect a program's ability to successfully market their BSW program, what has become clear to us about marketing is that it is more about ideas and creativity than money and resources. The lack of a targeted marketing budget has not stopped us from implementing an active marketing plan. A marketing mix of tools for your marketing plan could include:

Academic Activities. Articles in scholarly journals are another way to promote the program within the academic community. Articles submitted by faculty, bachelor or master's degree students are a good way of increasing the awareness and credibility of the program. Posting copies of faculty and student articles on bulletin boards in the hallway, seminar or classrooms advertises the engagement of faculty and students in scholarly activities. Speaking and training are good positioning tools and often a free or low-cost way to promote your program.

Advertising. Advertising can be divided into "image building" or "call to action" advertising. For "image building" advertising, strategically placed regular advertising is required. For "call to action" advertising, used mainly for information sessions, application deadlines and other short-

term goals, one-time advertising can be utilized.

Annual Reports. Careful consideration should be given to image, where you are going as well as where you have been. Annual reports are used both for positioning and promotion of the program and are used sometimes in place of an overall brochure, if your program changes significantly year to year.

Atmosphere and Attitude. First impressions are critical for recruitment and should reflect your commitment to quality and student service. Programs need to consider how their phone is routinely answered, are inquiries warmly received, is the website welcoming, how are people greeted when they come to your offices, is the atmosphere pleasant and comfortable, and are staff courteous and helpful?

Bring Guest to Class Day. On specific days during the semester, students are invited to bring their roommate, a friend or a parent to class. These events are scheduled based on class content of the day and provide an introduction to the profession and major. Students indicate that one of the ways they learned about social work as a major was from their roommates.

Brochures. Flyers, fact sheets, and other print materials can serve in the place of a program brochure. Programs need to pay close attention to image and message, considering shelf life and distribution. Use of pictures and headlines are more important than lengthy text.

Business Cards and Letterhead.

Generally considered office supplies but should be viewed from a marketing perspective. What message do you want to convey? Bought in quantity, they can be distributed freely and send a welcoming message.

Clothing and Promotional Item. The social work club annually designs and sells clothing items identifying the School of Social Work or social work. Clothing is worn by students and faculty and includes tee shirts, denim shirts, sweatshirts, and hats. The School designs and provides ‘prizes’ at information sessions, as tokens for guest speakers and other events. Items identify the school and college/university and keep the name out in the community. Items include tee shirts, hats, pens, magnets, bookmarks, bags, mugs and the Men at Work, Men of Social Work Calendar.

Collaboration with On and Off-Campus Groups. Social work clubs and honor society members can develop collaborative working relationships with other student groups on campus such as GLBT, students of color, social justice, and peace and justice. Often these groups are interested in many of the same issues as are social work students and collaborating on sponsoring events increases visibility of these groups, the social work major and the issues.

Connection with off-campus groups also provides a means to increase the visibility of the profession and the major. High schools community service-learning groups and high school church groups often are looking for speakers for career days and for partners for service projects. Inviting these groups to campus for ‘A Day on Campus’

promotes the profession, the major and your institution.

College Fairs. The purpose of college fairs is to be visible and make contact with prospective students. Be sure to get names and addresses of students who visit your booth and pick up your materials. Follow-up with these individuals with a letter and materials or postcard. It is the follow-up that usually produces the best results. Have a take away item at the both with your name on it that people that is useful and people will likely keep.

Conferences. Attending and exhibiting at local, regional and national social work focused conferences is an excellent way to market the school programs. The best combination is to have a presenter at the conference as well as an exhibit booth. Paid advertising in conference programs is another good means of increasing the visibility of the program with conference participants.

Direct Mail. Accurate database management is critical for this portion of the marketing mix. Lively and engaging direct mail pieces that ask the potential student for action or tell of upcoming events should be utilized to promote information sessions, deadlines and special event. *Career Choices*, published by NASW is sent with direct mail piece. A good inquiry database is vital for producing mailing lists. Academic testing services are another avenue to pursue for obtaining targeted mailing lists. An evaluation method for the direct mail projects should be considered when at all possible.

First Year Advising. Social work faculty serve as first year advisors in addition to

advising social work majors. Through scheduled individual and group advising sessions and activities, faculty are able to introduce first year students to the major and profession. Volunteering to serve as a first year advisor keeps social work faculty connected to academic advisors and raises the profile of the program at the institution.

General Education, Elective, Honors & Post-Secondary Course Development.

Inclusion of the Introduction to Social Work or Human Behavior in the Social Environment course as part of the general education core requirements serves to introduce students to the major and the profession early in the education. In addition, the program increases credit hour production running several sections per semester.

Offering of elective courses such as ‘Understanding Diversity in a Pluralistic Society’, ‘I Want to Help People’, ‘Social Welfare History’, ‘Anatomy of Violence’, ‘Grief, Loss and Bereavement’, etc. serve as vehicles to introduce students to social work faculty, the major and the profession. They also increase overall credit hour production for the major.

Development of an honors course for junior or senior majors can serve to increase visibility and respect and bring academic recognition to the program. The purpose of the honors program is for students to develop a stronger identification with the profession as practitioners and begin to develop an identity as a scholar.

Development of an introduction to social work course offered to high school students, on campus, in the evening for reduced credit, is a means of introducing them to the College/University, and the profession

of social work. It is an opportunity to clarify the differences between social work, psychology, sociology and criminal justice, and get them familiar with the campus. An official transcript is generated for each student and credits are transferable to all other accredited institutions.

Guest Presentations and High School Visits.

Faculty members do guest lectures in introductory courses in psychology and sociology and at local high schools and community colleges. They also meet with advisors and counselors at the high schools and community colleges for information about social work as a profession and our program.

In collaboration with the nursing department (could be any department wait listing students), faculty have developed an interdisciplinary case presentation at the time students are having academic difficulty with chemistry. The case presentation introduces them to other health related majors (social work, chemical dependency, occupational science, respiratory therapy). Students are given extra points by their chemistry teacher for attending the presentation.

Faculty and students together make visits to the student’s high school to talk with high school principals, advisors and guidance counselors about the profession and the major.

Informational Lectures. Another way to generate interest in the program is information lectures by faculty or guest lecturers. Paid advertising and publicity can support these marketing activities. Groups important to address are admission staff, academic advising and counseling staff, high school guidance

counselors and community college advising staff.

Inquiry Publication. This publication can be used as the first way of attracting students to the program. This initial publication must be compatible with other marketing publications used by both institutions, should be engaging for the student and ask the student to call, write, or e-mail for more information. A solid inquiry database management system is key to this portion of the marketing mix.

Newsletter. A well written, cleanly designed, up-to-date newsletter distributed on a regular basis is a good way to increase retention in the program as well as attract new students and keep alums up to date on school activities. A copy of the newsletter can be mailed in a packet to pre-screened potential students. Coverage of current events, faculty accomplishments, academic work and personal news from the school can all make the publication inviting and interesting. Any newsletter should be added to the school web site. The field education program may also write a newsletter to be sent to all fieldwork instructors. This is an excellent way of keeping fieldwork instructors updated on field seminar activities, workshops or training events.

Posters. Poster development includes ones that specifically promote the program and others that promote the major/social work profession. Creating and distributing a high quality poster with an attached response card is a good way to promote the program, increase an inquiry database and also learn potential geographically focused interest in the program. The poster can be sent to local

high schools and local and regional two-year institutions that have programs in sociology, psychology or other human services related programs. Creating posters that identify job possibilities, needs social workers address, roles social workers play, etc. provide recognition for the need for social workers and career possibilities with a major in social work.

Prerequisites and Scheduling of Introductory Courses. Careful consideration of courses such as ‘intro to psychology’ and/or ‘intro to sociology’ as prerequisites for Introduction to Social Work and placement of Introduction to Social Work in the four-year plan is critical. Making it possible for students to take Introduction to Social Work as first year students rather than sophomores, engages them in the major earlier.

Faculty teaching ‘Introduction to Social Work’ must be outstanding teachers, engaging, dynamic and experienced. Faculty can either ‘hook’ students or dampen their interest in the major by their behavior in the classroom.

Publicity. There are numerous publications including scholarly journals, magazines and newsletters that accept contributions on interesting or new programs in the field of social work. Releases should be submitted for information sessions, special events or lectures sponsored by the School of Social Work. This strategy often times generates high quality leads into the program. If your institution has a daily or weekly bulletin distributed to faculty, staff and students, submission of program events (date and description) and accomplishments is a good way of

keeping the community informed about school/program activities.

Radio and TV Spots. The University has produced radio and TV spots highlighting different Schools. The 'spots' are aired on public radio and TV generally for 30 seconds. The spots clearly identify the profession, School and institution.

Special Events. Information sessions are an effective way to bring interested people into the program for further information. These can be a simple presentation by program faculty and administration with a time for questions and answers, or can be as elaborate as workshops, seminars and panel discussions. Special events can be supported by paid advertising as well as publicity. Faculty and student collaboration at special events is particularly important. Current students are outstanding ambassadors for the program. Providing food (pizza, cookies, etc.) is an attraction and a motivating factor in attendance.

Targeted Mail. Bulk mailing of view books and information pieces to high school and community college advisors or counselors is an excellent means to call their attention to the profession and the program. Having a supply of materials allows them to give them directly to students who express interest without giving away their only copy. Faculty during high school and community college visits inquire about supply and need additional information.

Telephoning. Faculty telephone all new admissions (first year and transfer) upon acceptance that have expressed an interest in majoring in social work.

Faculty phon-a-thons occur following acceptance and often prior to depositing, as a way to answer questions, demonstrate personal attention and encourage attendance.

Video Development. Videos can be developed for marketing or instructional purposes. Both increase visibility and name recognition of the school. Development of a 8-10 minute video highlighting the differences between an undergraduate major in psychology, sociology and social work and what graduates can do with a major in social work. Providing this video to high school and community college counselors will help them with career advising. Instructional videos can be developed around a variety of topics to include job interviewing, skills training, client issues and field supervision challenges.

View book. This should be the program's showcase publication. The view book should not only feature the Bachelor of Social Work program, but also the college/university that students will join. Visual in nature, this publication should give students in-depth information on the program, program requirements, applying to the program and features of the program such as faculty. This publication is used for mailing to pre-screened inquiries, distribution at information fairs and to prospective students and other targeted distributions.

Visual Exhibits. (Board and Display in Student Center) The School obtains 'ownership' of a display window in the student center at the College/University. Updating the display with visually appealing art, books, posters, etc

increases the visibility of the major and school and support marketing activities. A portable display board is used at recruitment and information fairs to stimulate interest in the major and highlight activities of students.

Web Site. A vibrant, engaging and up-to-date web site is vital to the marketing of this program. The web site should not only give information on the bachelor of social work program, but also links to other university services such as financial aid and registration procedures. On-going maintenance and enhancements to the web site should be built into the program's staffing.

Word of Mouth. Acknowledged as the best find of advertising. A program gets this acknowledgement by doing what you do so well that people are excited and want to talk about it, making sure that everyone is informed, enthusiastic and pleased to tell everyone they know about the great things you do, and by asking your current students to pass the good word along to their friends.

The Communications Calendar is an important tool for keeping all responsible for implementing the marketing plan on tract. The dates reflect on-going projects as well as those initiatives completed. The month in which materials are listed are when they will arrive in the hands of students or when and advertisement will appear. Depending on the type of publication or advertisement, production time requires between two weeks and two months of advance notice. Developing and printing a new publication typically takes between two and four months. A Communications Calendar would include:

| <u>Month</u> | <u>Task</u> |
|---------------------|--|
| July | Fall registration period |
| August | Reprint Bachelor of Social Work View book (every 2 years ideally) Update display in Student Center Update program display board Staff booth at State Fair Meetings with prospective students Thank you letter with social work information Advising and Registration Session Meetings with high school counselors |
| Sept. | Meetings with prospective students Thank you letter with social work information Meetings with community college advisors Presentations in introductory psychology and sociology courses |
| Oct. | Meetings with prospective students Thank you letter with social work information Information Session Print admission to the major packet Career Development Class Presentation Meetings with high school counselors Presentations in introductory psychology and sociology courses |
| Nov. | Meetings with prospective students Social Work Awareness sessions prior to registration Thank you letter with social work information Meetings with community college advisors |

Dec. Meetings with prospective students
 Thank you letter with social work information
 Newsletter mailed
 Faculty-Phon-A-Thon to first year and transfer admissions
 Meetings with high school counselors
 Freshman Registration Events
 Day Transfer Registration
 Fall registration mailing
 Ad development
 Newsletter mailed

The ideas above are just a sampling of the many recruitment, marketing tools available. Investment in research, execution of the plan and on-going evaluation of marketing efforts is important for any successful on-going marketing strategy. Responsibility for facilitating most of the strategies for marketing the BSW program falls to the BSW program director and field director. Monitoring the web site, direct mail projects, informational and academic activities and special event coordination must involve faculty and staff. Publicity for the program should be done in conjunction with the College or University News Bureau. Members of the Social Work Club and National Honor Society should assist faculty with staffing 'awareness tables' and hosting events. It takes a commitment by all faculty, staff and students to participate to launch a successful marketing campaign.

Remember recruitment and marketing is not an isolated activity or event. It is a critical piece of the development of your program and reflects every aspect of your organization. An ongoing marketing campaign will help you project and

maintain a positive image to all stakeholders. It will help your program recruit and retain committed students and faculty. Finally, remember be creative, be visible, be contagious!

References

- Berger, Barb & Thornton, Serene (2004). Strategies to Spread the Word About Social Work. Presentation at the BPD Annual Conference, Detroit MA.
- Csikai, Ellen L. & Rozensky, Cindy (1997). Social Work Idealism and Students' Perceived Reasons for Entering Social Work. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33 (3), 529-538.
- Dennison, Susan T. (2002). Marketing Status of Social Work Education: An Exploratory Study. *The Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 7 (2), 77-91.
- Hanson, James G. & McCullagh, James G. (1995). Career Choice Factors For BSW Students: A 10-Year Perspective. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 31 (1), 28-37.
- Hodiak, Diane L. & Henley, Michael J. (2002). *Fund raising & Marketing in the One-Person Shop*. Development Resource Center, Seattle, WA.
- Raber, Marie, Tebb, Susan, & Berg-Weger, Marla (1998). Recruitment and Retention of Minority Students in Bachelor of Social Work Programs. *The Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 3 (2), 31-49.
- Rompf, Elizabeth L. & Rouse, David (1994). Choice of Social Work as a Career: Possible Influences. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 30 (2), 163-171.
- Stern, Gary J. (2001). *Marketing Workbook for Nonprofit*

Organizations. Amherst H. Wilder
Foundation, St. Paul, MN.
Stern, Gary J. (1997). *Mobilize People
for Marketing Success*. Amherst H.
Wilder Foundation, St. Paul, MN.