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Corporations, Colleges and Universities: What Makes Great Relationships So Great

Corporations have resources and jobs. Colleges and universities have intellectual energy and talent. It can be a marriage made in Heaven as long as everyone understands that the world of corporate/university relations is no longer just about writing checks that simply float over the transom.

We asked several experts in this field what makes a relationship between corporations, colleges and universities (hereafter known as university relations) successful in today's environment. We talked with

- ◆ **Paula A. Banks**, president of the Amoco Foundation, Inc.
- ◆ **Don Gamble**, director of university relations and college recruiting for Lucent Technologies.
- ◆ **Nick Komanecky**, director of university corporate relations for Cornell University.
- ◆ **Carolyn Sanzone**, assistant vice chancellor for science and technology advancement, corporate and foundation

relations at the University of Massachusetts.

- ◆ **Larry Scott**, managing director for national academic relations at PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

The distinct message from these interviews is that while corporations and universities have different motivations and benefit from each other in different ways, they can be complimentary forces. The most successful corporate/university programs build two-way, dynamic relationships that are personal and continue over time.

THE BIG PICTURE

In the 1980s, a recessed economy forced many companies to restructure. Since then, companies have aligned their activities more closely with corporate missions, goals and objectives. As Banks said, "At the heart of everything we do, it has to support our business strategies."

On college and university campuses, costs continue to grow. A recent *Case Current* magazine article noted that tuition and ancillary student fees typically cover less than 50 percent of the cost of an education.

"It may seem that everyone is expected to do more with less, and in some cases, that's true," said John Coy, president of The Consulting Network. "But, the trend we're seeing with these two groups who clearly need each other is that they're doing more by having a strategy, focusing on what's important and building long-term partnerships."

EXPECTATIONS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE TABLE

The Corporate View

"Companies are no longer just writing checks and hiring students," said Scott. "We are working on year-round relationships with mutual interests and concerns."

Partners at PriceWaterhouse-Coopers expect to hire the best and the brightest at entry and more experienced levels, said Scott. They also want to attract bright students to an accounting and business major as early as possible.

“But, we also know it’s important to try to influence the curriculum to help make it relevant, to help faculty understand what’s going on in the business world globally and to help them use the most effective teaching methods,” said Scott.

These investments, and selective involvement in research projects dealing with current business issues, are aimed at positioning PriceWaterhouseCoopers as an employer of choice on campus.

Lucent Technologies officials also expect to gain a competitive recruiting advantage at the universities they support.

“We work with 80 schools, 26 of which have a person from my staff managing the relationship — everything from philanthropy to recruiting to scholarships, research collaboration, faculty coming to work at Lucent and employees going to teach at the university,” said Gamble. “We also have the opportunity to influence curriculums that can provide a pipeline of industry ready talent, and we exchange best practices.”

While nurturing quality employees is important to Amoco

managers, too, Banks added that she expects to work with colleges and universities to build stronger communities.

“For example, our minority engineering retention program is important to us. It encourages minority students to pursue engineering as a career resulting, we hope, in a greater number of minorities going into the field,” Banks said.

“I think most companies do a better job of developing relations with their suppliers of raw materials ... than they do with providers of their most important resource — people.”

— Nick Komanecky,
Cornell University

What about expecting recognition? Gamble said, “I’m not sure whether we’re looking for recognition or just looking for the school to put us in a positive network with the students.”

“We just funded a chair at Stanford University for \$2 million, and there was a lot of recognition that went with that. It shows Lucent is a good corporate citizen, and that’s great, but what I really hope is that it will help us with

our recruiting strategy and objectives.”

“Recognition is not a requirement,” said Banks. “However, a certain level of recognition can help us and our university partner. It lets the community know what they stand for and what they’re involved in. It also can help attract other funders, partners and students.”

The University View

Komanecky said Cornell University aims to be a preferred institution for corporations, developing relationships that lead to support for education, research and outreach initiatives.

“The accent today is on recruiting, but in addition to acquiring top talent, companies come for basic research, patents and licensing and improving the competencies of their employees,” Komanecky added.

“The bottom line is that we and the corporations that fund us expect to enrich students,” said Sanzone. “Five years ago, the view of what universities can do for institutions was one way. Corporations were considered a one-way revenue stream for research, equipment, etc.”

“Today, there is value for both sides. To the university, it includes learning more about what is going on in the corporate world, providing valuable experiences to students, getting new directions for research and

being a continuing education resource.”

With limited resources and focused needs, companies are narrowing the list of university partners they consider worth their investments, Sanzone said. “We want to be on the short list, where it makes sense, and we realize we must invest in those partnerships that will have the biggest payoffs.”

“We’ve created our own list of companies, and it’s fluid. We’re concentrating on key companies that can help the university be better in the areas those companies find valuable. We hope they will hire our students and participate in all aspects of university life.”

IT’S JUST NOT THE SAME ANYMORE

Change is constant in any environment. What trends have emerged recently in corporate/university relationships?

The Corporate View

“About four years ago, we began to focus all of our higher education dollars on those institutions we saw as resources for future employees and on those focusing on underserved populations, such as minorities and women,” said Banks. “We narrowed our list from a broader audience to institutions more closely related to our business.”

“Then about a year ago, we decided to support those

institutions in other ways so they can remain strong — ways involving outreach to the underserved, some bricks and mortar and a learning and teaching environment that tears down differences so young people come into corporations ready to value team members from different backgrounds.”

The trend to get involved at all levels as an investment in future employees also happened at PriceWaterhouseCoopers. “Now, we have an ongoing relationship with universities involving planning, problem solving, continuous contact and interface in all areas,” said Scott.

In addition, Scott said the employee recruitment schedule has changed. “The competition for good students is tough. Recruitment starts earlier and earlier, you put more time and effort into it and it brings you onto campus more frequently.”

Gamble agreed, adding that Lucent is looking at new and creative ways to hire future employees. For example, in a recent visit to Penn State University, Gamble offered jobs on the spot to between 30 and 40 students — a successful strategy that Lucent plans to expand.

Technology also has affected corporate/university relations. Students often use the Internet to get information and to apply for jobs. But, Banks, Scott and Gamble agree that students still

want face-to-face contact with corporate representatives. “They want to visit the company, talk to the hiring manager, ensure they’re getting challenging work and feel the company’s culture,” said Gamble.

Gamble offered another change relating to the competitive recruiting environment. “Lucent has come out with an internal and external marketing plan that brands us on campus. For example, our recruiters dress the same way, our displays and materials have the same look, everything we do includes our ‘Define the Future’ tagline. We’ve defined our brand and our image to help students recognize us.”

The University View

Komanecy also noted what The Conference Board calls the “war for talent” and how the competition for future employees has made companies more aggressive on campus in recent years.

However, he stressed that developing a multifaceted relationship over time is the key to building a successful corporate/university relations program.

Sanzone agreed. “A number of years ago, we realized we needed to look at corporations holistically. As a development officer, I was not really talking about a total relationship with a company because of the way administration divides revenue reports. We realized we needed to develop relationships and not

worry about where the revenue stream flows.”

Another mutually-beneficial change is the ability to offer distance learning. “This is an example of an effective and efficient use of technology,” said Komanecky. “For example, Cornell’s Weill Medical College in New York City is working with a distance learning specialist and Microsoft to permit physicians in 20 area hospitals to witness each other’s rounds.”

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

The Corporate View

“The ideal scenario is where everybody sits around the table and finds a comprehensive way to work together to achieve mutual benefits,” said Banks. “It’s true sharing and partnership, give and take.”

“If the phone calls are always going in one direction, the program is not working at its best,” added Gamble. “If the exchange is happening both ways, and it’s all through the campus team, the relationship is working.”

Continuity is a feature Banks cited. “Continuity in terms of what we’re trying to achieve is important. Continuity of a particular program is less

important, because sometimes continuity is interpreted as dependency. Just as we create entry strategies, we also develop exit strategies. The important thing is the relationship and what it allows us and the institution to do.”

Marketing a company on campus as a single entity is critical, too, said Gamble. “We have 11 business units, and if we didn’t coordinate, Lucent could have 11 different faces.”

“We also have identified many of the people we’ve hired in the past 18 months to be alumni ambassadors to their campuses. These people are familiar with the professors, deans, student organizations and other campus connections that help make our program successful,” said Gamble.

Viewing a corporate partner as a consultant is evidence that the relationship is working, according to Scott. “We’re involving ourselves in the investment of our money. We’ve met and worked with students and faculty and brought administrators and faculty to our training center, for example. At that point, the university is calling on us as consultants to bounce ideas off of. That indicates the broad, pervasive relationship we’re looking for.”

The University View

“At Cornell, we conducted a survey with 29 other universities on best practices in the area of

corporate relations,” said Komanecky. “The primary factor for success is having a continued corporate presence regardless of economic swing.”

“For example, one large company had an excellent presence on our campus, but during an economic downswing, all contact was cut off for several years. That low profile and negative press has affected student interest in working for that company to this day.”

“I encourage companies to have presence particularly with students through classroom presentations by executives and managers, help on research projects, tours of their facilities, scholarships and so forth,” said Komanecky. “They also should develop a presence with faculty since they know the students and the industries students are inclined to work in.”

Presence includes co-ops and internships, which give students an opportunity to get hands-on experience in a specific company. “We have an excellent co-op program in our college of engineering,” Komanecky said. “Faculty visit each company involved to assess the quality of the educational experience and how well the students are performing from the supervisor’s point of view. In some cases, we’ve dropped companies that are not challenging our students. Others such as Boeing, Lucent, IBM, Johnson & Johnson,

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Independent Colleges and Universities Join Forces To Enhance Corporate Relationships

Corporate college/university relations may seem to revolve around large companies that support large, well-known universities. However, there is a host of smaller, independent colleges and universities that also merit corporate support.

The Foundation for Independent Higher Education (FIHE) works on behalf of 630 independent colleges and universities through a network of 37 state and regional independent college funds to ensure that a private college education will be available to students in the next century and beyond.

What changes are independent institutions seeing in their corporate relations programs, how are they strengthening those relationships and how can an organization like FIHE help? We interviewed **FIHE's President Carole Whitcomb** for her perspective.

"One of the most basic changes in corporate support is the move from unrestricted toward targeted giving — more specific projects that may be rather short term and produce measurable results.

"The most effective case that independent colleges and universities can make to corporations for support is their product — the graduates who have the characteristics that businesses look for in their employees."

"The nature of community on these smaller campuses prepares

students well for the work world. There is a place for everyone in a club or activity. Professors are accessible. The close-knit environment prepares students for the collegiality of an office setting and gives them unique opportunities to contribute as part of a team."

According to the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, independent institutions enroll 21 percent of all students and award 33 percent of all bachelor's degrees, 43 percent of all graduate degrees and 61 percent of all first professional degrees in the fields of law, medicine, engineering and business. Sixty-five percent of their students graduate within four years.

"The irony is that big businesses do not often recruit on smaller campuses. Fortunately through new technologies, we are seeing an increasing use of distance recruiting," said Whitcomb.

Whitcomb added that another challenge for smaller colleges and universities is their ability to make corporate connections beyond their local geography.

How can smaller, independent colleges and universities compete for corporate support? One way is by collaborating.

Whitcomb explained, "Two years ago, FIHE launched the Partnership for Private Colleges, through which corporations fund collaborative ventures among col-

leges. There are 45 such initiatives now, each involving three or more institutions and touching a range of campus entities from academics and student services to administration and joint purchasing. All of the programs are aimed at doing more with less."

For example, a Partnership grant helped three South Carolina colleges purchase costly and essential scientific equipment for biology and chemistry instruction. Converse, Limestone and Spartanburg Methodist colleges then agreed on a schedule to share this laboratory on wheels.

Whitcomb noted that independent colleges working together can offer many of the advantages equal to major university counterparts. For example, they can provide ways for companies to link with networks of colleges rather than requiring companies to make decisions institution by institution. "It seems to be one of the only ways smaller schools can build meaningful relations with the corporate community."

"Because business and industry have gone through the process of doing more with less, such as re-engineering, building strategic alliances and even merging, we find that they're very interested in funding these kinds of initiatives among colleges."

Relationships Continued

Travelers and Intel have provided very positive experiences.”

Cornell’s survey also showed that companies need a well-organized approach to campus, with a clear contact point, a well-trained campus team and an executive liaison. “They also need a multiyear plan that maintains the relationship across the university,” Komanecky said. “And, the company should make the distinction between recruiting relations and university relations.”

When this kind of all-encompassing partnership is in place, valuable exchanges can occur. For example, Cornell hosts “corporate days” that allow for a full day of interaction among the corporate team and university faculty, students and administrators.

“In the case of one company in the medical field, we brought together scientists from bioengineering, biotechnology, our medical college and our college of veterinary medicine. The day resulted in terrific scientist-to-scientist interaction.”

Another characteristic for success is integrating financial support to a college or university into the overall corporate relations plan. “In many cases, I see a disconnect between the philanthropic giving component of a company and the relations building component. There are many opportunities for a company to direct funds in the

areas of self-interest while also helping the institution with its financial needs,” Komanecky said.

Sanzone added that institutions must look seamless to their corporate investors. “We have one-stop shopping at the University of Massachusetts, and we are an advocate for our companies on campus. For example, we get the company’s information to faculty, administrators and students so they are prepared for corporate visits.”

Advocacy is easier when there is a clear understanding of the relationship’s value to all parties involved, Sanzone said. “We must have a goal or a set of goals toward which we are working, inform everyone on campus and reinforce the value of the partnership. We also must offer a facilitating framework, such as the master contract we created to make the negotiations process easier from the company’s point of view.”

Another characteristic for success is flexibility, Sanzone said. “You need the capacity to evaluate as you go and even shift course, if necessary.”

EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT WITHOUT THEIR CHALLENGES

Corporate View

“The greatest challenge for me is narrowing your focus in such a

way that you can still have impact but recognize that you truly can’t be all things to all people,” said Banks.

While Amoco wants communities to be self-sufficient, the company also is interested in touching tomorrow through programs that help support a talented work force and consumer base. “Talent for us means a high proficiency in math, science and engineering, so we focus on the institutions that stress those areas,” Banks said.

Challenges from Scott’s perspective include being creative to distinguish your company as a leading employer of choice. “You can never rest. If you’ve got the best idea out there, it won’t be the best by tomorrow.”

“There’s constant follow-up, reinforcement and information flow. It takes a lot of good people and energy. In fact, you have to be careful of burn-out. Keep yourself staffed with the right balance so you can give your recruiters a breather and balance of life,” Scott said.

“Another challenge for our profession is working with faculty to attract the best students to a major in accounting,” Scott said. “There is a significant drop in the number of college freshmen choosing to major in accounting and business. So, you’re not getting as many quality choices when you recruit for employees.”

The drop in accounting and business majors simply makes the challenge of competition that much more serious, noted Scott.

Not enough students are majoring in the areas of technology either, according to Gamble. “We have a small window of opportunity because there are too few candidates for our jobs. We need to act between September and November; otherwise we’re sacrificing the quality of the candidates we can get. So, don’t come to me in January looking for top students, because the competition will have eaten them up.”

The University View

Making the right match with the right company is one of a university’s greatest challenges, according to Sanzone. “It takes a lot of time to analyze a company and develop a network of people you can talk frankly with. You have expectations that more needs to be done, but you’re dealing with deep, complex relationships that take time.”

“Managing everyone’s expectations is a challenge, too, as well as being honest about where our strengths are. It’s very hard for someone to say that Program A is better than Program B, but you have to do that. We’ve spent a lot of time, especially with our faculty, on that discussion.”

Faculty and administrative buy-in to corporate relations programs can be a challenge, said Sanzone.

“The faculty’s expertise and programs are the delivery point. They must buy in. It’s time consuming, but worth the effort.”

Komanecy noted that staffing is a challenge from the university’s point of view also. “We have 650 companies or company divisions that recruit at Cornell. It’s impossible to service each one. Plus, through our tracking, we know those companies with which we want to maintain a relationship and those where we have an emerging relationship. Balancing the time and energy required to do both things is tough.”

FREE ADVICE FOR ANYONE CONSIDERING A PROGRAM CHANGE

The Corporate View

Banks suggested that corporate/university relations professionals bring the right people around the table to shape any new program. “Take off your myopic lenses, stop pretending you have all the answers and run the risk of asking questions, sorting through the answers and responding to those that make sense for the business you’re in.”

Gamble said, “Make sure you have corporate support. If you undertake a program at a school and the company is not behind you on everything, your promises fall short, and your relationship

can be ruined for years.”

Scott offered: “Develop a total program from start to finish. Target the universities that can provide you with the students you want. Be constantly visible. Have high energy and good personal skills. Be genuine and believable. And showcase your success stories — the talented people you’ve hired who are doing well and staying with you.”

The University View

“Figure out attainable goals and make sure everyone is clear about them. Realize you can’t change the world in three months,” said Sanzone. Also, be creative, flexible, patient and able to create consensus and excite people.

“I’d also like to suggest that you have operational support. I have a full-time marketing person who handles all communications on our web site, does targeted presentation materials for corporate visits and evaluates corporations and their strategic directions, among other things. This kind of help is invaluable.”

From Komanecy’s perspective, it can be helpful for corporate university relations professionals to view themselves as internal consultants for companies wanting to be more effective in university relations.

“We have a tool that deals with the relationship life cycle. It helps me see what I can do to move a company along according

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Characteristics of Effective Corporate University Relations Programs

The Consulting Network developed the following characteristics from years of benchmarking research with universities. These findings also are consistent with the results of a study conducted by Cornell University.

Well Organized and Strategic

- ◆ Team approach that involves technical professionals, highly placed executives, alumni and recruiters.
- ◆ Team members experienced in university relationship building and knowledgeable about the institution.
- ◆ Designated corporate contact (university liaison) who communicates regularly with others on team.
- ◆ Comprehensive, multiyear involvement plan.
- ◆ Unique competencies of corporation and university recognized and leveraged.
- ◆ Jointly developed programs incorporating shared objectives.
- ◆ Periodic mutual assessment of relationship.

Continuity of Presence

- ◆ Corporate team representatives who have been in position for a period of time.
- ◆ Consistent team interaction with campus personnel and students.
- ◆ Personal relationships developed with faculty and their students.

- ◆ Classroom participation.
- ◆ Advisory board participation and membership.
- ◆ Involvement opportunities recognized and acted on.
- ◆ Long-term commitment to relationship.

Strategic Recruiting Approach

- ◆ Active universitywide program.
- ◆ Program that distinguishes between recruiting and university relations.
- ◆ Recognition that university supplies important resource: people with knowledge.
- ◆ Research and partner program involvement.
- ◆ Active relationship with career services staff.
- ◆ Recent and highly placed alumni utilized as part of recruitment team.
- ◆ Internships and co-op programs offered.
- ◆ Faculty relationships actively cultivated.
- ◆ Opportunities for faculty and students to experience “real world of work.”
- ◆ Marketing plan that portrays a consistent corporate image on campus.

Meaningful Support

- ◆ Annual grants.
- ◆ Graduate fellowships.
- ◆ New, relevant equipment.

- ◆ In-kind or product donations.
- ◆ Facility upgrading or construction.
- ◆ Faculty/student exchanges between campus and corporate facilities.
- ◆ Endowed professorships.
- ◆ New faculty start-up packages.

Relationships Continued

to its interest in our university—from entry stage to maturity.”

“In addition, I would note that managing a multiyear university relationship is important for companies,” Komanecky continued. “But, I think most companies do a better job of developing relations with their suppliers of raw materials and subassemblies than they do with providers of their most important resource — people.”

“From working in industry, I know that effective companies do all they can to help their suppliers succeed. They see supply chain members as part of their team. I feel many corporate contributions personnel are out of sync with their companies’ best interests because they fail to ask what they can do to help the universities—the suppliers they’ve targeted—develop a critical resource: the very best new employees for their companies.”