

An Analysis of Enrolment Motivations for IT Students

Nick Wallingford

Bay of Plenty Polytechnic

Tauranga, New Zealand

nick.wallingford@boppoly.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

Students enquiring about the Diploma in Information and Communications Technology modules and the Bachelor of Computing Systems papers at the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic indicate the factors that motivated their choice of programme and institution. This study examines the responses over a four year period to identify the channels have been historically effective and those that might best be used to promote the courses into the future.

Marketing efforts to promote particular programmes rely on generalised experiences from all programmes, using a mix of media and events. Information Technology (IT) courses are seen in this study to provide additional opportunities in the area of Internet provision of information, as well as other untested channels such as text messaging and email promotions.

Methods of course promotion that have been used extensively in previous years, such as newspaper and radio advertisements, direct marketing and careers day/promotional events, do not appear to result in motivating students to enrol into IT programmes. The use of effective brochures and recognition of an educational pathway through programmes are high-ranking motivations to enrol. Provision of Internet-based information has been effective in the Bachelor of Computing Systems programme, indicating promise for future marketing of other IT programmes.

Keywords: Enrolments, motivation, marketing, promotion

1 INTRODUCTION

The Bay of Plenty Polytechnic offers a range of programmes leading to formal qualifications in the fields of computing and IT. These include:

- National Certificate in Computing Level 3 (NCC L3)
- Diploma in Information and Communications Technology Level 5 (DiplICT 5) (formerly CBC)

- Diploma in Information and Communications Technology Level 6 (DiplICT 6) (formerly DipBC)
- Bachelor of Computing Systems (BCS)

Some work has been done to describe the relationships between these programmes, including pathways for study and possibilities for cross-credits to allow for movement between programmes of study (Wallingford and Fleming, 2003).

Enrolment numbers have declined over recent years for some of these programmes, resulting in small intakes and the cancelling of some classes.

This research looks at one aspect of operations that may impact ultimately on student numbers - the initial motivation to contact the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, and eventually enrol into a programme of study, as provided by the students.

Further research should focus on other components, such as:

- course/level mix,
- potential pathways for study, and
- perceptions of the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic as a provider of educational services

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Data Source for Analysis

When a potential student initially expresses interest in a programme at the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, he/she is asked to indicate "Why did you choose to enquire at BOP Polytechnic?"

This data is collected from walk-in enquiries, encounters with possible students at careers exposition events, Internet enquiries and telephone calls to the Polytechnic.

When and if the enquiry results in an accepted application, the student-to-be completes a Student Detail and Enrolment Form that is entered into an information system for a range of subsequent processing.

This research used the indicated reason for enquiring for the students who ultimately enrolled into courses. It does not include data collected from people who made an enquiry but did not later complete the application, acceptance and enrolment processes.

2.2 Courses Considered

The data for DiplCT 5, DiplCT 6, National Diploma in Business Computing (last offered in 2002) and the BCS (first offered in 2003) was analysed to identify possible trends and differences between the programmes. Data that was collected for these programmes for 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 were utilised.

Some initial examination was made of the different streams of some of the programmes. DiplCT 5, for instance, is run as either a day class or an evening class. In some years, there has been a July intake (with that programme finishing the following July). No significant differences were found between these different streams, and subsequent work was carried out with data accumulated to programme level.

Two other programmes were chosen from Bay of Plenty Polytechnic offerings to provide some comparative data. The data related to the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic Certificate in Floristry Level 3 (Floristry) and the New Zealand Diploma in Business (NZDipBus) for the 2004 enquiries and enrolments has been used to quantify differences between these programme and the computing/IT programmes that are the primary focus for the research.

2.3 Potential Sources of Error

Potential students indicate the reason for choosing to enquire at the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic by the use of 'tick' boxes on the form. In some cases, these forms are completed by the potential student involved. In other cases, Information Centre Advisors complete the form.

There are no specific instructions regarding the completion of the form. In discussing the data collection, there was some disagreement among Information Centre Advisors as to whether one or more boxes could/should be ticked. The issue that arises relates to the possible unfair weighting of responses. If a respondent were to tick two boxes, using the data as obtained for this research, he/she would effectively be over-represented in the final analysis.

Forms completed from email enquiries (generally generated by a form on the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic web site) are recorded by Information Centre Advisors as being only motivated by "Internet" (Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, 2004). This may have the

consequence of over-representing "Internet" in the responses, as the person may well have had a different, or additional, reason for choosing to enquire at the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic. In some cases, it may be that the information provided on the website may not have actually contributed to the enquiry, but simply provided the mechanism to make the enquiry.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data provided included a considerable number of categories that were either rarely or never used to indicate motivation to enquire about courses. For this research, the categories with small numbers of entries have been accumulated into an 'Other' heading. For programmes with different target groups, these headings may have significant numbers of responses, but were not seen as useful discrete headings for this research for this set of programmes.

3.1 Motivation with Computing/IT

Over the full period four years of data collection for the programmes being analysed (DiplCT 5, DiplCT 6 and BCS), the following headings were most often indicated as the reason for enquiring about the programme:

2001 - 2004 Computing/IT Enrolment Motivations Compared

Brochures/prospectus	21%
Next level of programme	18%
Referred by friend	15%
Information Centre	9%
Internet	5%
All other combined	32%

(n=785)

For the 2004 enrolments only, however, the figures indicate that importance of the Internet as a reason to enquire has increased considerably, and a considerable reduction in the number of responses relating to brochures and prospectus:

2004 Computing/IT Enrolment Motivations Compared

Next level of programme	20%
Referred by friend	18%
Internet	14%
Brochures/prospectus	13%
All other combined	36%

(n=102)

There are also differences between the programmes, even for the computing/IT programmes of study that might be expected to encourage similar students and interests. Using the data from 2003 and 2004 (as these are the only two years available for the BCS) it would appear that BCS students rely more heavily on the Internet as a means of obtaining initial interest in the programme:

'Internet' as Reason for Enquiry for Computing/IT in 2003 - 04

BCS	20%
DipICT 5	5%
DipICT 6	7%
NatDipBC	0%

The BCS programme has had, since its inception, web pages to provide detailed programme information. Initially, these pages were hosted as a part of the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic web site, but were later established as a domain of its own (Bachelor of Computing Systems, 2004). The 2004 BCS student intake identified during their orientation week that the information had been used extensively in planning for enrolment and specific programme of study to undertake.

3.2 Motivation in Other Programmes

Figures from DipBus, the BOPP Certificate in Floristry, and the accumulation of the computing/IT programmes (DipICT 5, DipICT 6 and BCS) were compared for the 2004 enrolments only:

2004 Enrolment Motivations Compared for Three Programmes

Programme	IT	DipBus	Floristry
Brochures/ Prospectus	13%	17%	12%
School careers	7%	9%	2%
Info Centre	4%	9%	16%
Next level	20%	7%	0%
Friend	18%	16%	21%
Internet	14%	11%	12%
All others	24%	31%	37%

The data does appear to indicate some differences between programmes for reason for enquiry and ultimate enrolment. While the differences may not be large, they should be acknowledged and considered in the development of a marketing plan specific to a programme of study.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Students obtain initial interest and information about programmes of study by a range of audio and visual media, as well as through events organised to promote the programmes of study. Different programmes will often provide a significantly different 'mix' of media and events that might best attract student interest for the specifics of that programme.

At the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, marketing programmes that rely heavily upon newspaper and radio have not resulted in large numbers of students indicating those media as their initial motivating factor. It is possible that students might fail to acknowledge these sources for various reasons. It is possible that more qualitative research, such as through the use of focus groups, could either confirm the value of the marketing programmes, or perhaps explain the low frequency of that response in these figures.

It is not entirely unexpected that computing/IT students might express the use of technological means as a vehicle for obtaining information. A well-developed marketing plan should both identify and capitalise on this preference.

Into the future, other uses of IT technology might well play a part in marketing efforts, including either Internet or mobile phone technologies that could contribute without being intrusive or annoying to the potential student.

5 REFERENCES

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