

QUESTION #19:

HOW DO I DEVELOP A FAVORABLE IMAGE FOR THE LAC AND HOW DO I PUBLICIZE THE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF THE LAC?

A conversation with Frank L. Christ

Publicity is the art of developing materials and activities to announce and increase attendance at learning assistance programs and services. Publicity is aimed primarily at students and faculty.

Public relations attempts to create a favorable image of learning assistance staff, programs and services. Public relations, a broader

activity than publicity, focuses on campus administrators, faculty, students, parents, and community.

Most efforts at publicity and public relations by many LAC administrators seem to be characterized by reluctance, false modesty, lack of objectives, absence of data, and evidence of its effectiveness.

Can we talk about publicity first? How do I get started publicizing my LAC?

Since you are starting a new center, I suggest that you focus on five major activities:

1. creating a description of the center and its programs and services for the campus catalog;
2. developing announcements in the campus newspaper and on campus radio, television, and web sites;
3. designing an LAC bookmark with essential program information that can be placed in textbooks of selected classes and also made available at selected campus locations;

4. briefing academic departments, related support programs like counseling, academic advising, orientation, and student associations and clubs that can lead to outcomes like faculty invitations to present to their classes, becoming a partner in orientation programs, and guest appearances at student meetings; and
5. placing signage both outside the center and on campus to direct people to the center.

A lot of what I am suggesting involves graphics and art. Use your campus art department and its students to help you with designing an LAC logo, your bookmarks, handouts, LAC interior walls and entrance graphics, and even T-shirts for LAC staff.

What about publicity for a center that I have been hired to direct?

First, I would find out what has already been done by looking through the campus catalog, reading back issues of the campus newspaper, combing the center's files for correspondence, art work, and copy relating to past publicity efforts. Then, use what is acceptable to you and your staff; revise material to reflect your views of the center's role; and write new copy to announce that you are the new LAC program administrator and describe your plans for its programs and services.

And before I forget, if the center had a mission statement with goals and objectives, review it. Revise and refine it to give you tasks and expected outcomes that will publicize the center. If there is no mission statement, write one and specify tasks, timelines, and staff responsible for each objective.

I think I have enough to get me started with the center's publicity. What about program image—what you call "public relations"?

Personally, I think public relations involves developing a campus network that includes every significant administrator, faculty mem-

ber, and student leader as well as media and news people both on and off campus.

How do I go about developing a campus network?

Before answering, let's define your campus network as identified individuals on your campus who can help in some way to make your program successful. You can define your network by making a list to identify those cam-

pus individuals, scheduling and delegating networking activities, maintaining a networking activities log, reviewing the networking activities log periodically, and revising your list semesterly.

Can you describe how I would go about doing this?

Sure. Networking should be written as an annual goal with objectives, tasks, timelines, and staff members responsible.

Oh, and another thing. You might consider developing a secondary network of off-campus people and groups that can impact on your campus image. For example, meet with United Way and senior citizen groups for vol-

unteers, other local colleges, local high schools, reporters from local newspapers, special interest groups like computer clubs, and college alumni officers.

Use that network to let everyone know how wonderful your center, its programs and services, and staff are.

Wait a minute. "Wonderful" is a fuzzy word. What do you mean by "wonderful"?

Well, "wonderful" has a different meaning for different people in your network. For your president—yes, he/she is part of your network—and for other senior administrators and faculty, "wonderful" means academic visibility and recognition through professional activities and awards. Every professional conference that you attend; every association office that you are elected to; every article, letter

to the editor, book or software review, textbook or software program that you author or co-author; and every award and honor given you—and by the way, "you" includes every member of your staff—should be brought to their attention by correspondence and also submitted to campus and local media for publication.

What can I do to achieve academic credibility and enhance my program's image?

You can serve on university LAC committees, especially ones dealing with retention and orientation. You might also consider developing an LAC advisory board composed of faculty and student leaders. Both of these activities give you visibility at a high level on your campus.

You can network with high schools and community colleges in your area. You can impact on the local community by being part of a campus or community speaker's bureau and making presentations on learning assistance and by giving workshops on skills such as time management, speed reading, computer literacy.

A final few words. As director of the Learning Assistance Support System at CSU Long Beach, a program respected both on-campus and nationally, I made publicity and public relations happen by specifying annual objectives. To demonstrate our accountability in reaching these objectives, I started and maintained a series of large scrapbooks containing news copy relating to the LAC. These scrapbooks were evidence of completed publicity and public relations tasks by the LAC. They also came in handy when we wrote our annual reports.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Christ, F. L. (1979). An audio tour of a university learning assistance center. *Technological Horizons in Education*, (6), 1, 50-51.
- Knight, B., & Helm, P. (1981). Developing trustee commitment to learning assistance. In F. Christ & M. Coda-Messerle (Eds.). *Staff development for learning support systems. New directions for college learning assistance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 19-27.
- Lowenstein, S. (1993). Using advisory boards for learning assistance programs. In *Perspectives on Practice in Developmental Education*. New York College Learning Skills Association.
- Maxwell, M. (1997). Attracting students and developing a positive image. In *Improving student learning skills: A new edition*. Clearwater, FL: H&H Publishing Company.

Frank L. Christ has been with CRLA all of its existence beginning as a founding member in 1966 when he was at Loyola University, Los Angeles. Frank is a Past President (1968-69), editor of two WCRLA Proceedings (Combined Proceedings of the First, Second, and Third Annual Conferences and Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference, Newsletter Editorial Advisory Committee (1968-71), author of six articles, six of which were published in the association proceedings, recipient of Distinguished Leadership Award (1970), Distinguished Service Award (1972), and Long and Outstanding Service Award (1986). Frank coined the phrases; "Learning Assistance Support System," "Learning Assistance Center," and "Learning Assistance" in a 1971 CRLA article. Frank was the director of the Learning Assistance Support System at CSU-Long Beach from 1972-1989 and is presently a Visiting Scholar with the University Learning Center, University of Arizona, where he co-directs the annual Winter Institute for Learning Assistance Directors and Practitioners. His email address is flchris@primenet.com.