Student Use of Information Sources About Student Activities

by

Paul Matthew Dolezel

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Approved:

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Don G. Creamer
Chair

_____ _____
D. David Ostroth Janice K. McBee

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Don G. Creamer, Chair
College Student Affairs

(Abstract)

The ability of professionals in student activities to inform students of scheduled events is a key factor in the success of their programs. While traditional forms of communication with students, such as newspaper announcements and campus flyers, have not been totally reliable, they remain among the standard forms of getting the word to students about campus activities and events. Other forms of communication with students now are available, such as web pages and electronic infolines, but student activities professionals still do not know with any degree of certainty which forms are preferred by students and which are most effective.

The study was guided by the question, " What are students‘ preferred and actual record of use of selecting sources of information about campus activities at Virginia Tech?" and was intended to collect and analyze data about actual student use of various forms of formal communication to inform them about campus events. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses were used to portray actual use patterns of students and to test whether these patterns differ by class standing and gender.

It is anticipated that findings from this study will be useful to all student groups who plan events for wide-spread participation by students, to advisors of student groups including the Virginia Tech Union, and to student affairs professionals who are responsible for enhancing student involvement on campus.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Student Activities professionals invest a great deal of time to devise programs that meet the needs of the students. To promote these programs, they rely on several mediums to convey the what, where, and when of the programs they are presenting. What is generally not known is how students find out about these programs. Specifically, which methods do students use for gaining information about student activities? To that end, this study was designed to answer this question: What are students' preferred and actual record of use of selected sources of information about campus activities at Virginia Tech, including the World Wide Web sites sponsored by University Unions and Student Activities (UUSA), telephone usage (Student News Automated Phoneline (SNAPline) operated by UUSA), phone mail, fliers, the *Collegiate Times*, Television, and word of mouth.

Purpose of Study

Little research has been conducted into this important aspect of student activities. Literature is available that discusses the best ways to plan, implement, and advertise programs but very little literature exists concerning student use of the available media. This study adds to that small amount of research by taking a practical look at the available media types that are used in advertising campus activities. This study examined the different media types and how they are used by college students. The results are important to professionals working in student activities and to UUSA who plan and advertise events for students, but have no hard data about the media types students prefer to use.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of student comfort using modern methods for obtaining information (e.g. the WWW)?
2. Which methods do students prefer to use for obtaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech?
3. Which method do students view as the easiest method of accessing information?
4. Which method do students view as the most informative method of accessing information?
5. Which method do students view as the most reliable method of accessing information?
6. Are there significant differences in usage patterns between men and women?
7. Are there significant differences in usage patterns between upper and lower class students?
8. Are there significant differences in usage patterns between on and off-campus students?

Limitations

One of the most significant limitations in this study was the reliability and validity of the instruments used to gather data. The questionnaire was developed exclusively for this study and no reliability tests were administered for this instrument. Two pilot tests were conducted to improve the design of the instrument and to ensure that the participants and the administrator both understood what information was being asked on the questionnaire. The results of the phone survey in phase II of research served as a reliability check for the data collected in phase I by comparing usage patterns revealed in both phases.

Another limitation of the study was a low response rate from graduate students during the first phase of data collection. Responses from graduate students, therefore, were not considered in the data analysis. While there was graduate student representation in the second phase, the lack of representation from the first phase did not allow for a comparison between the two.

The design of data collection in phase I required that students volunteer to take the survey as they passed the collection point on-campus. Some students did not completely fill out the survey, and, therefore, their responses were discarded. Some students participated only to get the candy offered as an incentive. They hurriedly filled out the survey, took their candy, and promptly left. The speed with which they filled out the survey did not indicate that they took the time to read the questions or properly follow the survey directions. Cases such as these were disallowed in the data analysis.

While the data collection method in phase II required less than three minutes to complete in most cases, some of the participants were still impatient with the process. Some of the participants did not take the survey seriously and gave some unorthodox replies. Since most of the strange remarks fell into the comments section, these participants were included in the analysis.

This study was also limited in the sample size. With a university that has an enrollment of over 24,000 students, 300 is a small sample. Greater numbers would have allowed for greater variation in the results and might have shown if there were any additional differences between groups.

Definitions

The following are definitions of terms that were used in the course of this study:

Phonemail: An answering machine service that is accessed through on-campus phones. A computer records incoming messages and allows playback later.

SNAPline: The service, the Student News Automated Phoneline, (SNAPline), is a phone system that has a touch-tone interface. It allows students to access prerecorded information about activities.

Television: Any method of gathering information from a television set. This included the screens around campus that displayed current activities information, the college television station, and any mention of activities through commercials or public service announcements.

Word of Mouth (WOM): Any verbal communication of activities information between, friends, acquaintances, or strangers.

Organization of the Paper

This thesis is comprised of four chapters that detail the study. The first was an introduction to the topic, the reasons for the study and the definitions for the study. The second chapter contains a review of relevant literature. Chapter three outlines the methodology used in conducting the research and the instruments used to gather data. This chapter also describes the plan of analysis for the data. Chapter four contains the results of the data that was collected. Chapter five discusses the results and the implications they have for future research and the possible applications for practice.

CHAPTER 2
Literature Review

For the purposes of this study the literature review is comprised of three topics. The first topic is marketing and promotion of activities and involves the development of programs in terms of the groups they target and the methods that are used to convey information to target audiences. Marketing theories and promotional techniques are also discussed. The second section deals with the methods colleges and universities use to communicate with students. This includes the traditional methods of communication as well as the emerging technology of the information age. The nature of commuter students, as a special population, is considered in the third section.

The Literature Search

To find material relevant to this study, the search was broadened from the original focus on the methods students use to gain information on student activities. This focus proved to be too narrow to find enough information on which to base a thesis. The search was expanded to include marketing techniques and communication methods of colleges and universities. Electronic searches yielded a modest amount of literature, but other measures were necessary to complete the task. An issue by issue search of the ACUI Bulletin from 1982 to 1996 yielded only one article and one reference that proved useful to this study. A similar search was conducted with the Campus Activities Programming journal with greater results in useful material from 1985 to 1996. Marketing textbooks were used to provide insight into the theories behind advertising and promotion. The references in those textbooks provided some additional materials. By expanding the search, articles from different areas were applied to the literature review and proved useful.

Marketing and Promotions

This section examines techniques suggested by professionals that can maximize efforts in marketing products or services. At a basic level, marketing is defined as a strategy to transfer goods or services from one party to another. Promotion is a method of communicating information that is intended to alert others to the offered goods. This section introduces the topics of marketing and promotions as well as the theories behind their usage.

The definition of marketing has undergone some changes in the later half of this century. Scholars and practitioners have debated what the true definition of marketing is, and what the theories behind this concept should be. Kotler (1972) defined the core of marketing as a transaction. A transaction is "an exchange of values between two parties" (Kotler, 1972, p. 48). This transactional viewpoint allowed for an exchange of more than just goods or services, but also of time, resources, or energy.

Sheth, Gardner and Garrett (1988) in their book on the evolution of marketing theory noted that some marketing experts took exception to the simplistic point of view Kotler originated in 1972. Practitioners broke marketing theory into two subgroups: services marketing and products marketing. This came about due to the fundamental differences in what is exchanged during the transaction. When a product is exchanged, the purchasing party has gained something tangible that can be stored and transported. Transactions of services lack these qualities, but allow others the use of facilities, products, or activities without allowing them ownership of the services.

Kotler and Armstrong (1997) co-authored a textbook that included a chapter on developing effective communication in marketing. After identifying a target audience planners must identify what type of response they wish to elicit from the target audience. Planners

generally want the end result of their work to be a purchase from a target member, but there are several steps that can come first. Kotler and Armstrong identified six buyer-readiness stages (Kotler & Armstrong, 1997, p. 429) that consumers pass through when deciding to make a purchase. These stages are awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase.

The first two stages in Kotler and Armstrong's buyer-readiness model involve marketing and advertising strategies that inform the target group about the product and increase their knowledge regarding the product. Creating a positive image in the minds of the target audience about the product and building upon that image and making it stronger are the next two stages. The fifth stage cements the idea in the target audiences' minds that the product is the best for them. The last stage can be more difficult. The target audience may feel strongly about the product and have a strong positive image concerning it, but that may not motivate them to purchase. The message contained in the advertisement can determine whether a consumer will purchase the product.

After defining what the desired response is, a message needs to be developed. Kotler and Armstrong state that the message should "get attention, hold interest, arouse desire, and obtain action" (Kotler & Armstrong, 1997, p. 430). Identified in the book are three themes that the message content could follow. The first is rational appeals that relate the product to any common interests within the target group. Emotional appeals are designed to create positive or negative emotions that encourage people to pursue the product and make a purchase. There also are moral appeals that play off of people's sense of right and wrong. Moral appeals are often used to motivate people to participate in social causes.

To better demonstrate the techniques involved in marketing, Jain (1993) authored a textbook on marketing. Jain stated that "promotion strategies are concerned with the planning,

implementation, and control of persuasive communications with customers" (Jain, 1993, p. 505). Advocated within the promotion chapter was a scientific method of dividing up the work on a promotional campaign. With this buildup method, the managers responsible for their particular part of the campaign must analyze the contribution their promotion will play in reaching their marketing goals, or, in the case of student activities, the departmental goals. The allocation of funds for the promotional campaign would then be based upon the overall contribution towards the marketing goals.

Many marketing efforts follow a traditional course of planning where a strategy is decided upon, and then tactics are devised to enact the strategy. Ries and Trout (1989) stated that the "strategy dictates tactics" (Ries & Trout, 1989, p. 5) method is ineffective and a poor practice. The method they advocated was bottom-up marketing where a successful tactic is discovered and a marketing strategy is built around that tactic.

Ries and Trout (1989) state that an idea is a tactic, but, specifically, it is a competitive mental angle. Tactics must be competitive with other groups that are marketing items. For student activities professionals, this competition may involve encouraging students to attend one activity over the others that may take place simultaneously. The mental angle rests on creating a clear advantage for a product or service in the minds of the target audience. Marketers want the public to think of their product (or event) as superior to others that are available to the public.

Strategies, as Ries and Trout (1989) note, should be like life and focus on the journey and not the goal. When planning, goals must be decided upon and then a course of action to reach those goals can be defined. They emphasize that a strategy is not a goal, but a coherent direction in a marketing plan. In contrast with a tactic, a strategy can have several components that all

focus on the single tactic (idea). By their definition, a plan should include an idea that will motivate the public and a way to effectively exploit that idea in a successful manner.

Dalrymple and Parsons (1995) and Luther (1992) saw marketing strategies as action plans designed to meet the long-term goals of the organization. The dimensions of a marketing strategy include the product or service market the marketer is involved with and the amount of investment (time or money) needed to grow. Strategic marketing is beneficial as it allows organizations to predict future trends or events rather than reacting to these occurrences after the fact. The foresight is forced upon organizations as strategic marketing requires them to plan for the long run.

The marketing techniques that various companies use all have one philosophy in common. The customer is the driving force in the market place. This topic has been discussed in several forums (Ramacitti, 1994; Shocker, Stewart & Zahoric, 1990) and all tend to agree that the customer shapes the competition in marketing. Dalrymple and Parsons (1995) defined marketing as "the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individuals, organizations, and society" (Dalrymple & Parsons, 1995, p. 2). This definition emphasizes the need to satisfy the customer in marketing. Ramacitti (1994) stated that marketing is the whole business as seen through the eyes of the customer.

By choosing one product over another consumers present marketers with the challenge of reshaping the choices customers' make when purchasing. Some businesses can lose sight of how valuable the customer is while tending to the needs of their company. Their behavior, however inadvertent, can cause them to lose business. Examples of this include playing loud music over the

speakers in stores, having office hours that are unsuitable for the schedules of the customers, and failing to place advertisements in a timely manner.

As opposed to the general steps to take in developing a good marketing strategy, Seiden (1990) compiled a list dubbed “The seven deadly sins of advertising.” The first was bad taste such as Dr. Scholl’s foot odor ads that depict people fainting or animals dying due to someone’s foot odor. Bad judgment and insensitivity were second and third, respectively. Double entendres was fourth followed by a harmful spokesperson. Number six was inappropriate ads such as targeting an older audience but using a youthful vehicle to convey the information. The last “sin” was a misleading advertisement where Seiden gave an example from a Tylenol commercial. Tylenol depicted a teacher who suffered from headaches and an ulcer, but after he switched to Tylenol, from aspirin, his ulcer stopped bothering him. This gave the impression that Tylenol cures ulcers, which could prove deadly. Seiden’s point was that ads should inform people correctly about what they are getting from the product.

Jain identified advertising as “nonpersonal communication transmitted through mass media” (Jain, 1993, p. 509). Mass media includes the traditional methods of print, television and radio, but has expanded lately to include telemarketing and modern electronic means such as the WWW. When developing a promotional strategy, marketers should consider which media types would best serve their goal of reaching the consumer. One such approach was the hierarchical approach that involved gaining consumers’ initial attention and maintaining favorable attention and interest. This can also involve affecting consumers’ motivations, feelings, recall and recognition towards a product or service. This method is similar to the attitudinal method that focuses on increasing the salience of a product and influencing the way people evaluate products.

Nylen (1986) presented a four-step approach to using media. Several approaches were detailed that could be used when developing advertising objectives and plans. Step one involves defining media requirements to meet the needs of the marketing objectives. This step takes into account budget constraints, the target audience, and any product distribution needs that exist. After defining the media requirements the second step involves selecting a medium that meets those requirements. In the third step a vehicle is selected. A vehicle would be specific magazine to advertise in, or a television show in which to place the ad, or a particular radio station to air the advertisement. Determining the size (or time length) and the timing (scheduling) of the advertisement is the last step. These steps were echoed in a book by Arens and Bovee (1994) where they expressed them in the form of questions. The only difference was an added questions: "What opportunities are there for integrating other communications?" (Arens & Bovee, 1994, p. 366).

Jain(1993) highlighted two factors that must be considered when selecting a media type: cost per contact and matching the audience with the media characteristics. Cost per contact involves planning the media avenue based upon the advertising budget. To undertake the second step, the advertiser must have an understanding of the consumer. This understanding must include knowledge of customer location and demographic characteristics.

The advertiser must determine which media types the target group uses with the most regularity (Luther, 1992). If the target group is a heavy television watching group then a television based plan would be more effective. These factors must be considered to maximize the media coverage that is purchased. The media plan is an extension of the marketing objectives and must interact with the other elements in the marketing scheme, such as the product characteristics, promotion plans, and packaging (Barban, 1993).

Hanson (1996) wrote about improving student activities by implementing effective marketing strategies. The essence of the article focused on promotional techniques for selling ideas to the public. Also included in the article were steps for evaluating an advertisement before it is released. These steps detail criteria that every advertisement should meet to be effective in reaching the target audience.

Promotion was defined as everything that is done to communicate a product or service to a market audience to persuade them to act. One of the components of promotion is advertising which the author defined as "any paid form of non-personal promotion of ideas, goods and services by an identifiable sponsor" (Hanson, 1996, p. 16). For an advertising plan to be effective, it must decided who the target audience is and tailor the campaign around what motivates and interests them, according to Hanson.

Hanson notes that people are constantly bombarded by advertisements that carry many messages, but they will only remember a select few. The article included a checklist that can be used to evaluate an advertisement before it is sent out for publication. The ad should stand out and grab the reader's attention. The message should be relevant to the readers; something they can relate to. Reading this ad should inspire the audience to find out more about the message. The ad should be easy to read and have focal points that leads readers eyes to important information. Illustrations should cause readers to stop and read further. Headlines should inspire interest and the copy should lead the reader to pursue the information described.

When promoting an event, Hanson suggests that the promoter carefully consider how the information is to be disseminated. With all the media types available, promoters should select the mediums that the target audience frequently uses. Timing also is essential, as promoters will want to inform the target audience of the event at the optimal time. Promoting too early might cause

the target audience to forget about the promotion and promoting too late will not give them enough time to react. Publicity campaigns can be used to increase public awareness of the organization behind the activities. Stories that are published in the paper or broadcast on television or radio can promote the organization and lend to the credibility of the organization. These stories can be about anything new in the department, achievements in employees and student staff. Other story topics can include seasonal events, events that relate to national issues, or human-interest stories.

Marketing managers need to understand the customers they are trying to reach with their marketing strategies. To accomplish this research must be done in their product area. To maximize their research they must define the problem, assess the best method to obtain the information, devise a budget, select an analysis method, and create useful strategies from the information gained through research (Kerin & Peterson, 1993). One warning that was issued by Kerin and Peterson is to act in a timely manner. They gave an example from Campbell's Soup Company who spent 18 months testing a new fruit beverage only to have three competitors release fruit blends ahead of them.

Reaching the Student Population

Many different mediums are available to colleges and universities that allow them to communicate with students. In the past, verbal and paper methods were the primary methods used to pass along vital information. These methods are still in use, but they are not used in conjunction with other, more modern methods. Many colleges and universities advertise events and services on the world wide web, as well as on other electronic services. Actis (1995) examined the implementation of a campus wide information system at a small liberal arts school with 1,500

students. The study examined how the system was implemented and what goals the designers had in mind while it was being constructed. Some of the goals the designers envisioned dealt with privacy, ownership, policy and other issues as well as content standards and resource allocation.

In 1992, Kenyon college completed a campus network that connected the whole campus to electronic mail, student information, and other services. Actis noted that, prior to this, much of the community had begun exchanging information via e-mail and by other electronic means. Some interested factions at the college began to look for better ways of distributing information to all of the campus community. The concept of a campus wide information system was created with the goal of providing access to college information and other internet resources. The designers were intent on creating resources that could be accessed from locations across campus twenty-four hours a day.

As with many such electronic endeavors, there the expectation that use of the new network would increase productivity and allow more efficient operation of distributing information. There was also the expectation that it would reduce the amount of paper usage on-campus by having these resources accessible through electronic means. There were concerns about what information should be placed on this system. Privacy issues addressed by Actis (1995) were in concern of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. An individual's phone number and address are readily available through a phone book. By placing this information on an electronic platform, this information becomes available to a wider audience. This fact can compromise a persons privacy and, in some extreme cases, their safety.

Standards for information display were created to ensure that the information system was well received, as Actis noted. All information to be displayed was of an appropriate nature which the designers defined as information that was of general interest to members of the campus

community. All information had to be current and constantly updated and checked for accuracy and quality. Participants were required to obey all copyright laws all submissions followed a strict format.

Actis noted that it took a year from the implementation date for the system to reach its peak usefulness. While it was intended to supplement the forms of communication that were in use, several forms of paper-based communication were replaced by this system and others had a reduction in paper use.

Smith and Ely (1994) wrote about applying technology in new ways to better reach students. New means of distributing information exist that are faster than typical paper or phone methods. There were concerns about the practicality of these methods and if the students would use the new methods once they were available. Questions are posed in the article that colleges or universities must consider when identifying their objectives for communicating with students.

Smith and Ely noted that, much like the corporate world, colleges and universities are looking for new ways in which to communicate with their primary audience. The audience, according to Smith and Ely, is the student body and schools are looking for ways to reach them other than the bulletin boards, newspapers, and mailings that are currently used. To make improvements campus leaders need to answer a few questions about their institution. The first question is whether a communications strategy exists on-campus. Trying to implement technology to improve communications when no plan exists will not solve problems, but could potentially compound the current ones.

An important aspect of a new communication strategy noted by Smith and Ely deals with the target audience. Leaders must also establish who will comprise their target audience. Methods used to communicate with faculty will differ from the methods used with students. If a school is

trying to communicate with both groups, then the differences and the similarities must be identified as well as potential problems that a new system might incur. Institutional leaders should also consider other agencies that could be involved to help reach their goal. The involvement of others can help defray the production costs and can provide valuable feedback on how best to implement a new system.

The Commuter Population

Commuter and off-campus students represent a group that student activities professionals find difficult to reach. For the purposes of this study, off-campus and commuter students are considered to be the same. Many commuter students attend classes at night or attend classes and leave the campus. This makes it hard to include them in any programmed events. They may feel disconnected from campus life or overlooked by the administration.

Wilmes and Quade (1986) described some of the common needs of commuter students and the effect those needs have on the programs offered them. They also examined programming goals that were designed to increase the involvement of commuter students. The authors included examples of programs that have been effective in increasing the involvement of commuter students.

One of the major obstacles that programmers face when designing programs for commuter students is the diversity of commuter population. Many commuters have jobs, have families to tend to or they may be single parents. Despite the diversity, this group has many common concerns, such as financial management, transportation, developing relationships, dealing with stress. Wilmes and Quade also noted that these students also have a common concern in effectively managing their time. Commuters tend to schedule their classes into blocks to maximize

their time on-campus. Their time is then spent coming to and from classes and to the parking lots. This leaves little time or opportunity for the discovery of activities or resources on-campus.

Another aspect of commuter student lives that Wilmes and Quade noted was the handling of multiple life roles. Students may minimize their activities by participating in activities that are most important. Therefore, if an activity appears to be of less importance than other activities students are less likely to attend. While some activities may be designed as opportunities for students, commuter students may view them as threats to their carefully managed time.

Perry (1990) drew from the article by Wilmes and Quade (1986) when she wrote about fostering a sense of belonging among off-campus students. On-campus students usually have more contact with faculty members so interaction between off-campus students and the faculty should be encouraged to try and balance the scales. Fliers and other advertisements should be placed in where off-campus students will encounter them. This could also be done by creating a central area for students to spend time in and relax.

The administration should show concern for off-campus students and their unique needs and offer special services to these students. An example of a special service could be free use of local phones so students can resolve any matters they have to attend to while they are on-campus. There should be leadership opportunities for off-campus students and social events that are scheduled in a timely manner. Social events can be crucial for off-campus students during the first month of a semester as this is the time they are most lonely and their anxiety levels are rising.

Commuters sometimes face prejudice from faculty and administrators. There are many stereotypes about commuter students that abound in higher education. Some stereotypes hold that commuters are less committed to their education, they are academically deficient, or that they have no interests in the campus aside from their classes. The last stereotype prompted Likins

(1991) to research this idea and establish if there was truth behind it. Roughly three quarters of the participants reported that they returned to campus up to three times a week for non-class related activities. While students may be active on campus, 65% of the participants reported a desire to feel more a part of the campus community.

It should be noted, however, that the stereotypes mentioned are derived from research done on campuses where the commuter students, who are undergraduates, live at home and commute or are part-time students working towards a degree. The commuter students involved in this study were also undergraduates, but the majority reside in housing close to campus and are generally full time students. The stereotypes noted above are not representative of the students who participated in this study.

Summary

The marketing literature advocated a strategic planning process for developing marketing campaigns. A combination of media used in advertising was also strongly recommended. A combination of media would allow an advertising campaign to reach a greater number of people. This is important when the target audience includes commuter students who, by their nature, are difficult to reach. Residential students are constantly exposed to advertisements as fliers are posted in virtually every building on campus including the residence halls. Commuter students do not always have this type exposure available to them.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

To meet the goals of this research project certain procedures were created in advance of data collection. This chapter describes those methods, as well as the sample, the population, and the instruments that were used in the study. The data were collected through the use of survey research. Surveys were used due to the large amount of information that can be gathered in a short period of time. This data could then be processed and analyzed in a short period of time. Using quantitative methods, patterns could be discerned in the data and interpreted accordingly. These procedures were designed to address these research questions:

1. What is the level of student comfort using modern methods for obtaining information (e.g. the world wide web)?
2. Which methods do students prefer to use for obtaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech?
3. Which method do students view as the easiest method of accessing information?
4. Which method do students view as the most informative method of accessing information?
5. Which method do students view as the most reliable method of accessing information?
6. Are there meaningful differences in usage patterns between men and women?
7. Are there meaningful differences in usage patterns between upper and lower class students?
8. Are there meaningful differences in usage patterns between on and off-campus students?

Population

The school was a mid-sized university with a total enrollment of 24,812 for the fall semester of 1996. Full-time and part-time enrollment accounted for 20,525 undergraduates and 4,287 graduate and professional students. The university has facilities that can house up to 8,500 students on-campus with the rest, over 16,000, residing off-campus.

Participants

A total of 270 people participated in this project. They were drawn from the student population at Virginia Tech and included a mix of undergraduate and graduate students, men and women, and on- and off-campus students. Subjects in the first phase of the research were drawn as convenience samples and were offered an incentive to participate. The incentive consisted of their choice of candy. Subjects in the second phase were chosen through a random sampling process. Participants also were told that all questions related to events and activities that occur on the Virginia Tech campus.

Location

Tables were set up across campus and passersby were offered an incentive to participate in the survey. One location was at an on-campus dining hall that is frequented by on-campus, undergraduates, and the second location was a high traffic area between a large academic building and the library. The second location is part of a corridor leading to the main campus and to the downtown area off-campus. A large number of students pass through this area every day on the way to and from class and/or meals. This location was chosen to increase the sample size, and it allowed a broad range of people to participate in the study, as well. This variety served to reduce bias. The students who participated in the study had to approach the table voluntarily and without

solicitation due to university requirements. The students who participated comprised a convenience sample as they were not intentionally selected to participate, but happened to pass by the table when data were being collected.

Surveys also were collected from three classes that occurred on-campus. One location was a class meeting of the Virginia Tech marching band. The band is made of students representing all of the colleges of the university and contains a mix of on- and off-campus students as well as upper and lower class students. A human sexuality course was chosen because of the mix of upper and lower class students who take the course. The sociology course that was used was a sophomore level course but was comprised of students from every class level except graduate students.

Procedures

Phase I data collection

The first phase of the data collection process involved collecting surveys from two hundred people at various locations across campus. Participants were asked to answer all questions on the survey and that the questions related to activities and events that occur on the Virginia Tech campus excluding fraternity and sorority events and organization meetings.

Instruments

The instrument used for the first phase of data collection was developed in cooperation with the Director of University Unions and Student Activities (UUSA) at Virginia Tech. The Director of UUSA expressed a desire to answer certain questions about how students gained information about activities at Virginia Tech. The media types the students were asked about were the world wide web, television, fliers, phonemail, the campus newspaper, SNAPline, and word of mouth. The questions on the survey were designed to address the research questions as

well as the needs of the Director. The instrument used in the first phase of the study was a survey containing nine central questions:

1. Please rate each of these methods for gaining information according to **your level of comfort** using them.
2. Please rate **how often you use** the following sources for obtaining information about activities here at Virginia Tech.
3. Please rate **how informative** these methods of accessing information are.
4. Please rate **the reliability** of these methods for gaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech.
5. Rank these sources of information according to your **preferences** for using them.
6. Rank these sources of information from 1 (**Easiest** to use) to 6 (**Hardest** to use).
7. Do you have convenient access to the world wide web?
8. Will you have convenient access to the world wide web in a year?
9. What other suggestions can you make for improving the distribution of information about campus activities?

The final version of the survey can be found in Appendix A. For all instrument items, the participant were asked to consider seven methods of transmitting information: the world wide web, fliers, the SNAPline sponsored by UUSA, the Collegiate Times newspaper, Television, phonemail and word of mouth. However, word of mouth was not used in the first instrument item. It seemed fairly self-evident that people would be comfortable with using word of mouth. The first four questions asked the participant to rate each method of gaining information on a scale of one to six. The scale for each question was provided with each question. The last two

questions asked the participant to rank order the methods of gaining information from one to six. The instrument collected demographic information that was used in the analysis of the data about the participant's class level, gender, and housing status. Class level was broken down into freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate. Residence status was either on-campus or off-campus.

Instrument Development

The first version of the personal survey was a double sided sheet of paper that had check boxes for the students to fill out. This form was given to ten students to fill out as a field test. The comments from the students were used to improve upon the instrument. Specifically, they mentioned that some of the questions were hard to understand and that they were unfamiliar with some of the items mentioned on the survey. The next version was printed on an OPScan form (see Appendix A) that would facilitate coding of the data and would reduce the amount of human error that could occur during coding. The new version also contained some item definitions that were intended to help the students complete the survey. This version was administered to eleven students and their comments were used to improve the survey once more. This led to the final form of the personal survey.

Phase II data collection.

The second phase of data gathering entailed a phone interview with participants being chosen through systematic sampling. The primary researcher completed all of the phone interviews. To reduce the bias in the sample several pages were chosen, at random, from the student telephone directory. The first name at the top of the page was the first to be called. If the person was not home a call was placed to the next person on the list. When a person was reached the surveyor greeted the person and opened the dialogue with this statement "I am doing

University approved research at Virginia Tech and I would like to ask you a few questions. The procedure should take only two minutes." After the participant completed the survey the surveyor counted down to the fifth name that followed on the list and contacted that person. Exceptions were made in data collection as non-local numbers or unlisted phone numbers were not called. This interview was done in semi-structured format where the participants were asked four main questions:

1. How many programs or events did you attend last semester **excluding student organization meetings**?
2. What kinds of programs were they?
3. What methods do you use to gain information about these and other events at Virginia Tech?
4. What suggestions can you offer for improving the promotion of events?

Instrument Development

This survey was first printed on an OPScan form to facilitate data encoding. The form included the same demographic components as the personal survey. This version contained five main questions, the fifth being "How did you find out about these programs?" The last question "What suggestions can you make for improving the promotion of events?" was an open ended question with blank space for the surveyor to copy the response of the participant. The survey contained twenty-eight encoded items and space for the response to the last question. The revised survey (see Appendix B) contained twenty encoded items, with blank space to copy the participant's response to the open ended question. The fifth question on the previous version was removed on the second version as it replicated question #3, "What methods do you use to gain information about these and other events at Virginia Tech?"

Data Analysis

Data collected from the personal survey were analyzed in several ways. The four questions at the beginning of the survey asked the respondents to rate each method of gaining information. The responses were combined into frequency counts that yielded the level of comfort, the frequency of use, the reliability, and the level of informativity for the media types. The resulting frequency counts were used in the analysis by looking for response patterns. The last two questions had the participants rank order the methods of accessing information according to their preferences for using them and according to how easy they are to use. The responses were looked at for the top two choices, the bottom two choices and the middle three choices. The frequency of usage was cross-tabulated, and chi square tests were completed using the collected demographic information to assess meaningful differences between gender, academic level, and housing status.

CHAPTER 4
Results

Introduction

This section details the raw data that was collected, and the methods used in the analysis of the data. Frequency counts were used as one of the major methods of analyzing the data. The original frequency counts are presented in table form and are followed by figures that detail the data after analysis. Chi square tests were conducted to assess differences between the demographic groups. The data were analyzed and interpreted in an effort to address the eight research questions. Those questions were:

1. What is the level of student comfort using modern methods for obtaining information (e.g. the world wide web)?
2. Which method do students view as the most informative method of accessing information?
3. Which method do students view as the most reliable method of accessing information?
4. Which methods do students prefer to use for obtaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech?
5. Which method do students view as the easiest method of accessing information?
6. Are there meaningful differences in usage patterns between men and women?
7. Are there meaningful differences in usage patterns between upper and lower class students?
8. Are there meaningful differences in usage patterns between on and off-campus students?

Frequency counts were used to analyze the data for questions one through five. Cross-tabulations of frequencies with certain demographic information were used to address questions six through eight. Chi square tests(X^2) were conducted on these cross-tabulations to estimate the significance

of the results and to help determine if there were meaningful differences between the demographic groups.

Comparison of the Samples

The sample size for phase I was comprised of 170 students. Due to the low response rate of the graduate students, they were excluded from analysis. This left a total sample size of 164 (n=164) for phase I. The sample size for phase II was 100 (n = 100) with no groups excluded. Both samples are compared and the results are shown in Table 1. The samples were very similar by gender with slightly more women participating than men. By location, the samples also were similar with more on-campus students participating than off-campus students. While the distributions of class standings were different for each phase of research, there were slightly more lower class students in each phase.

Results

Research Questions 1 - 3

In phase I of research, three survey items directly addressed research questions one through three. The seven response options for these items were grouped into four categories for analysis. The first two options were grouped together to form a positive response, the third and forth became a neutral response, and the fifth and sixth formed a negative response. The last option, “have never used,” was kept separate and reported with the other options groups.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentages of Participation in Phase I and Phase II by Demographic Category

Demographic Category	Phase I N (%) (N=164)	Phase II N (%) (N=100)
Gender [a]		
Male	72 (43.9)	44 (44.0)
Female	88 (53.7)	56 (56.0)
Location		
On-campus	92 (56.1)	61 (61.0)
Off-campus	72 (43.9)	39 (39.0)
Class Standing		
Freshman	43 (26.2)	34 (34.0)
Sophomore	48 (29.3)	18 (18.0)
Junior	31 (18.9)	16 (16.0)
Senior	41 (25.0)	22 (22.0)
Graduate	[b]	10 (10.0)

[a] Four responses were coded improperly in phase I

[b] Due to the low response rate, surveys filled out by graduate students were discarded

The first item on the survey "Please rate each of these methods for gaining information according to your level of comfort using them" addressed research question one, "What is the level of student comfort using modern methods for obtaining information?" The results are displayed in Table 2 and the four response groupings used in the analysis are displayed in Figure 1. Students felt most comfortable using the world wide web, fliers and television. They displayed a lack of comfort in using phone mail and the *Collegiate Times*, while most students had never used the SNAPline.

Research question two, "Which method do students view as the most informative method of accessing information," was addressed in survey item three "Please rate how informative these methods of accessing information are." The results and the analysis are displayed in Table 3 and Figure 2 and display the world wide web, fliers and word of mouth as most informative. The *Collegiate Times* and television were at the lower end of the scale for informative value.

The results pertaining to research question 3, "Which method do students view as the most reliable method of accessing information?", are displayed in Table 4 and Figure 3 and were addressed in survey item four "Please rate the reliability of these methods for gaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech." As seen before, fliers, the world wide web, and word of mouth were rated higher than other methods. The *Collegiate Times*, television, and SNAPline were rated lower than the other methods.

Table 2

Number and Percent of Responses Concerning Level of Comfort With Type of Media (N=164)

Media Type	Response Options [a]							
	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)	6 N (%)	7 N (%)	Missing N (%)
WWW	75 (45.7)	64 (39.0)	10 (6.1)	5 (3.0)	2 (1.2)	2 (1.2)	6 (3.7)	0 (0.0)
Fliers	56 (34.1)	60 (36.6)	25 (15.2)	10 (6.1)	3 (1.8)	5 (3.0)	5 (3.0)	0 (0.0)
Phone Mail	50 (30.5)	49 (29.9)	27 (16.5)	15 (9.1)	9 (5.5)	9 (5.5)	6 (3.7)	0 (0.0)
Collegiate Times	37 (22.6)	64 (39.0)	26 (22.0)	10 (6.1)	5 (3.0)	3 (1.8)	19 (11.6)	0 (0.0)
SNAPline	10 (6.1)	7 (4.3)	12 (7.3)	3 (1.8)	4 (2.4)	6 (3.7)	117 (71.3)	0 (0.0)
TV	69 (42.1)	45 (27.4)	24 (14.6	8 (4.9)	5 (3.0)	7 (4.3)	6 (3.7)	0 (0.0)

Note. Table shows response frequencies after removal of graduate students

[a] 1 = very comfortable; 2 = comfortable; 3 = slightly comfortable; 4 = slightly uncomfortable; 5 = uncomfortable; 6 = very uncomfortable; 7 = have never used

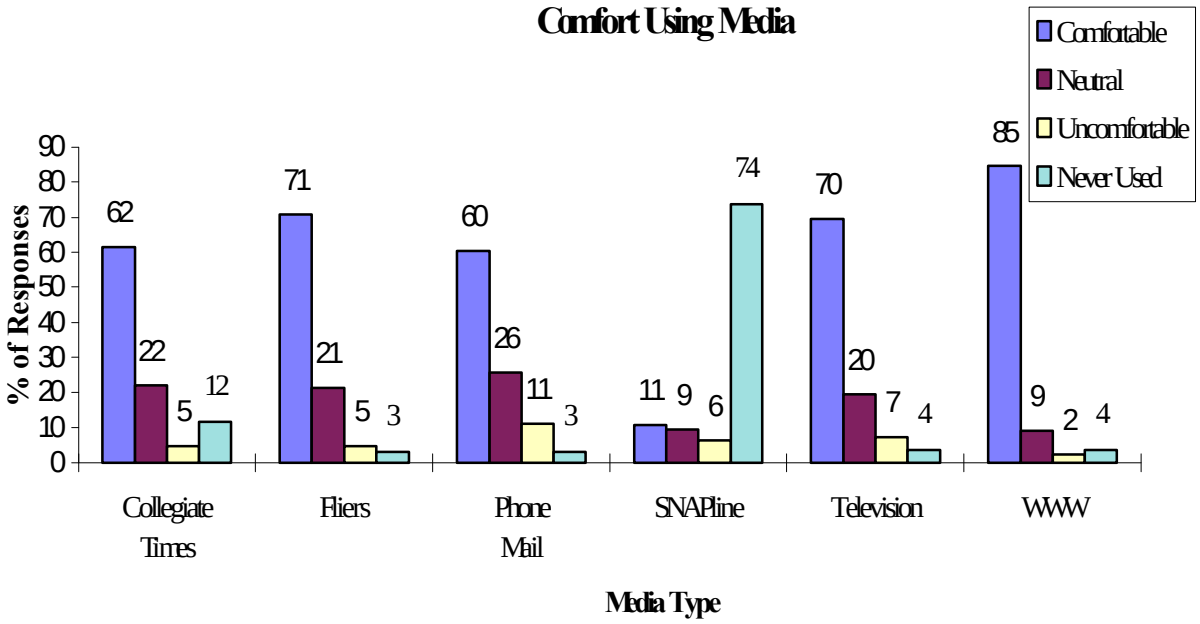

Figure 1. A comparison of student comfort levels using different media types.

Table 3

Number and Percent of Responses Concerning How Informative The Media Types Are Seen (N=164)

Media Type	Response Options [a]							
	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)	6 N (%)	7 N (%)	Missing N (%)
WWW	60 (36.6)	69 (42.1)	20 (12.2)	3 (1.8)	2 (1.2)	2 (1.2)	8 (4.9)	0 (0.0)
Fliers	43 (26.2)	69 (42.1)	37 (22.6)	10 (6.1)	2 (1.2)	1 (0.6)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
Phone Mail	33 (20.1)	50 (30.5)	35 (21.3)	21 (12.8)	6 (3.7)	8 (4.9)	11 (6.7)	0 (0.0)
Collegiate Times	17 (10.4)	61 (37.2)	45 (27.4)	15 (9.1)	10 (6.1)	1 (0.6)	15 (9.1)	0 (0.0)
SNAPline	1 (0.6)	8 (4.9)	14 (8.5)	7 (4.3)	5 (3.0)	4 (2.4)	124 (75.6)	1 (0.6)
TV	33 (20.1)	46 (28.0)	43 (26.2)	23 (14.0)	4 (2.4)	6 (3.7)	9 (5.5)	0 (0.0)
WOM	59 (36.0)	56 (34.1)	39 (23.8)	2 (1.2)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.2)	4 (2.4)

Note. Table shows response frequencies after removal of graduate students

[a] 1 = very informative; 2 = informative; 3 = slightly informative; 4 = slightly uninformative; 5 = uninformative; 6 = very uninformative; 7 = have never used

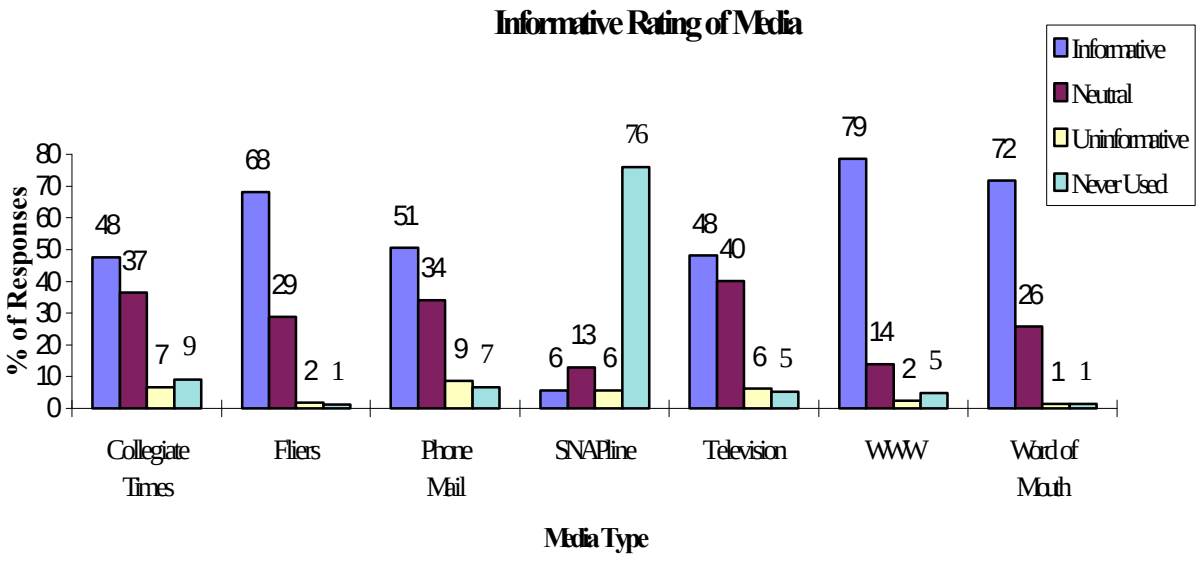

Figure 2. Ratings of how informative the media types are viewed by students.

Table 4

Number and Percent of Responses Concerning How Reliable The Media Types Are Seen

Media Type	Response Options [a]							
	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)	6 N (%)	7 N (%)	Missing N (%)
WWW	42 (25.6)	58 (35.4)	25 (15.2)	9 (5.5)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	20 (12.2)	8 (4.9)
Fliers	44 (26.8)	70 (42.7)	35 (21.3)	6 (3.7)	6 (3.7)	1 (0.6)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
Phone Mail	44 (26.8)	70 (42.7)	35 (21.3)	6 (3.7)	6 (3.7)	1 (0.6)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
Collegiate Times	27 (16.5)	56 (34.1)	46 (28.0)	14 (8.5)	3 (1.8)	2 (1.2)	16 (9.8)	0 (0.0)
SNAPline	2 (1.2)	8 (4.9)	11 (6.7)	4 (2.4)	8 (4.9)	3 (1.8)	128 (78.0)	0 (0.0)
TV	19 (11.6)	56 (34.1)	43 (26.2)	24 (14.6)	7 (4.3)	4 (2.4)	11 (6.7)	0 (0.0)
WOM	32 (19.5)	58 (35.4)	47 (28.7)	22 (13.4)	3 (1.8)	1 (0.6)	1 (0.6)	0 (0.0)

Note. Table shows response frequencies after removal of graduate students

[a] 1 = very reliable; 2 = reliable; 3 = slightly reliable; 4 = slightly unreliable; 5 = unreliable; 6 = very unreliable; 7 = have never used

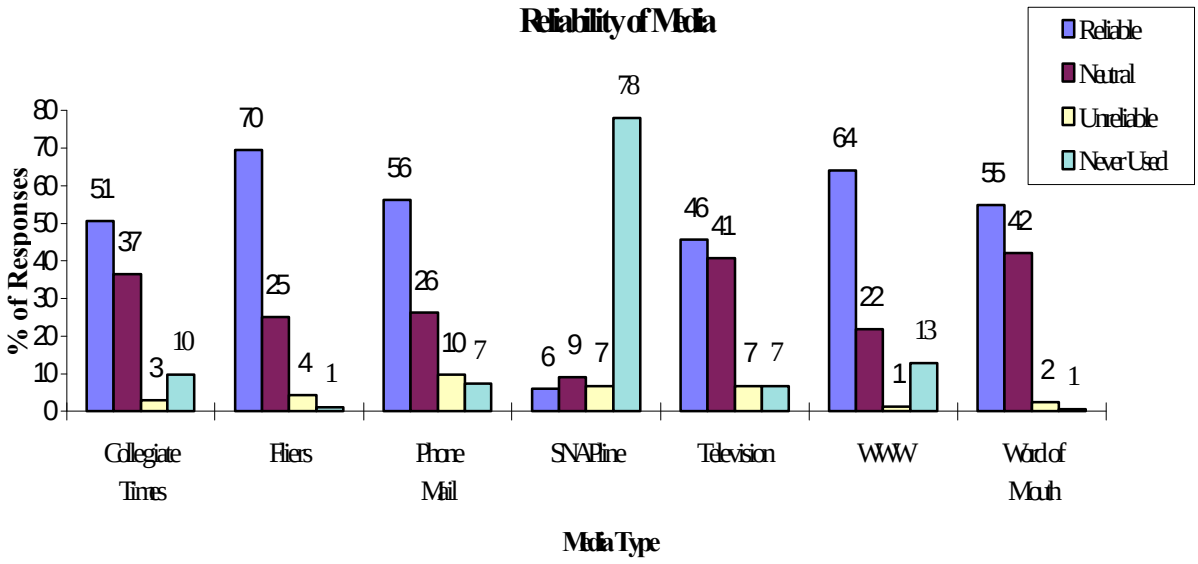

Figure 3. Ratings of the reliability of the media types by students.

Research Questions 4 - 5

There were two questionnaire items from phase I of research that pertained to research questions four and five. The items required participants to rank the listed media types in order from one to seven. The response options were grouped into three categories for analysis. The first and second response options were grouped together to represent the top choices. The sixth and the seventh response options were combined to form the last choices. The third, fourth, and fifth options represented the middle choices.

The results of the questionnaire item concerning research question four "Which methods do students prefer to use for obtaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech?" are displayed in Table 5 and Figure 4. Students preferred using word of mouth most followed by the world wide web and fliers. Aside from the SNAPline, where 89% listed it as their last choices, the *Collegiate Times* and phone mail were the last choices people would make in selecting a media type.

Results for research question five "Which method do students view as the easiest method of accessing information?" are displayed in Table 6 and Figure 5. Word of mouth was rated as easiest to use with 68% citing it as one of their top choices. Fliers were the top choices for 45% of the respondents. As seen before, the SNAPline was poorly rated by the participants with 91% marking it as their last choices.

Table 5

Number and Percent of Responses Concerning Preference of Use by Type of Media (N=164)

Media Type	Response Options [a]							
	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)	6 N (%)	7 N (%)	Missing N (%)
WWW	47 (28.7)	29 (17.7)	24 (14.6)	23 (14.0)	14 (8.5)	18 (11.0)	9 (5.5)	0 (0.0)
Fliers	26 (15.9)	47 (28.7)	37 (22.6)	27 (16.5)	14 (8.5)	11 (6.7)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
Phone Mail	13 (7.9)	19 (11.6)	30 (18.3)	27 (16.5)	33 (20.1)	33 (20.1)	9 (5.5)	0 (0.0)
Collegiate Times	9 (5.5)	14 (8.5)	23 (14.0)	40 (24.4)	33 (20.1)	34 (20.7)	10 (6.1)	1 (0.6)
SNAPline	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.2)	4 (2.4)	12 (7.3)	27 (16.5)	117 (71.3)	2 (1.2)
TV	16 (9.8)	18 (11.0)	24 (14.6)	27 (16.5)	41 (25.0)	30 (18.3)	8 (4.9)	0 (0.0)
WOM	57 (34.8)	39 (23.8)	24 (14.6)	17 (10.4)	16 (9.8)	6 (3.7)	5 (3.0)	0 (0.0)

Note. Table shows response frequencies after removal of graduate students

[a] 1 = Most Prefer … 7 = Least Prefer

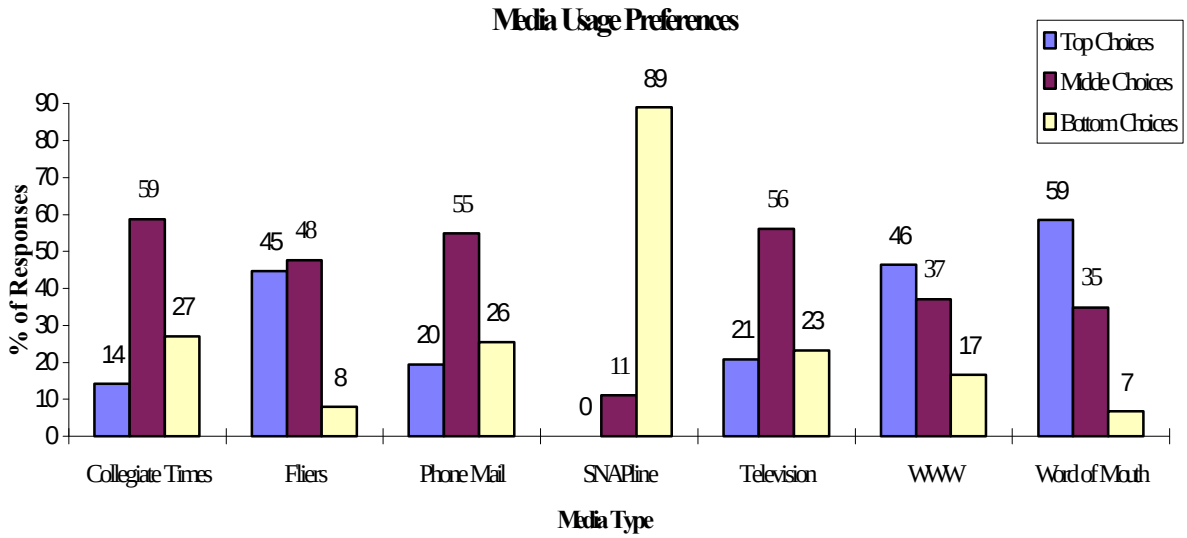

Figure 4. Students preferences in using the various media types.

Table 6
Number and Percent of Responses Concerning Ease of Use by Type of Media

Media Type	Response Options [a]							
	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)	6 N (%)	7 N (%)	Missing N (%)
WWW	23 (14.0)	22 (13.4)	22 (13.4)	26 (15.9)	26 (15.9)	34 (20.7)	11 (6.7)	0 (0.0)
Fliers	32 (19.5)	41 (25.0)	39 (23.8)	29 (17.7)	12 (7.3)	9 (5.5)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
Phone Mail	7 (4.3)	25 (15.2)	35 (21.3)	27 (16.5)	31 (18.9)	35 (21.3)	4 (2.4)	0 (0.0)
Collegiate Times	7 (4.3)	14 (8.5)	31 (18.9)	37 (22.6)	45 (27.4)	24 (14.6)	6 (3.7)	0 (0.0)
SNAPline	0 (0.0)	2 (1.2)	1 (0.6)	4 (2.4)	8 (4.9)	26 (15.9)	123 (75.0)	0 (0.0)
TV	10 (6.1)	39 (23.8)	22 (13.4)	29 (17.7)	29 (17.7)	27 (16.5)	7 (4.3)	1 (0.6)
WOM	86 (52.4)	25 (15.2)	15 (9.1)	13 (7.9)	11 (6.7)	6 (3.7)	8 (4.9)	0 (0.0)

Note. Table shows response frequencies after removal of graduate students

[a] 1 = Easiest To Use … 7 = Hardest To Use

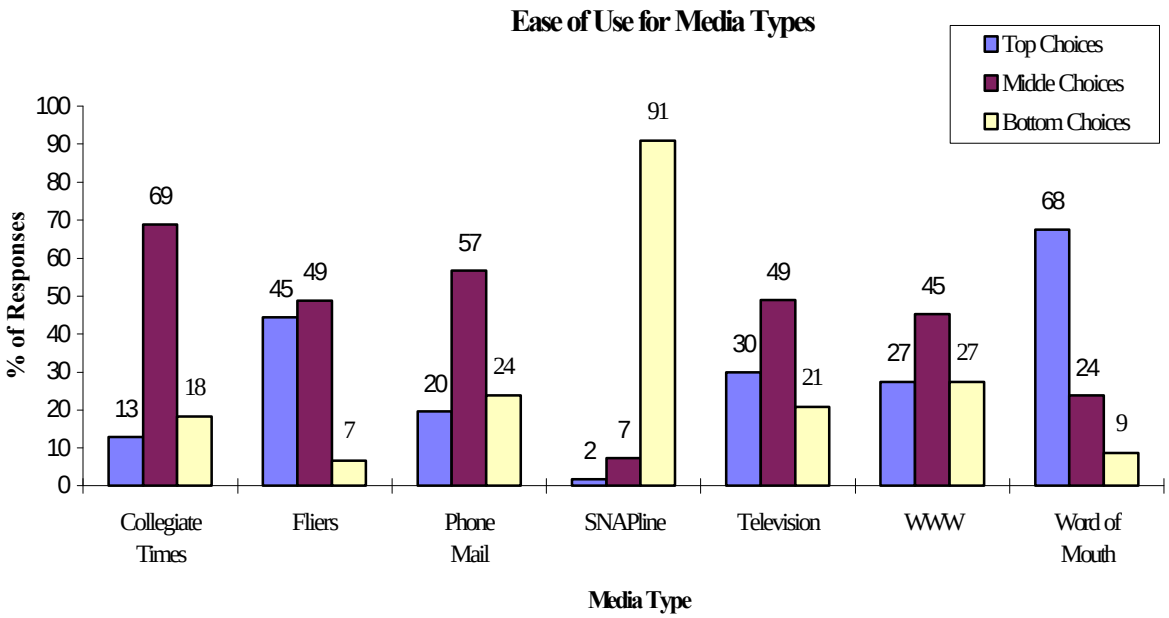

Figure 5. Ratings of how easy the media types are to use.

Research Questions 6 - 8

For the last three research questions, which concern differences in usage patterns, it is important to highlight the general usage patterns of the student population. For the phase I data the method of analysis was changed slightly from that of the other frequency measures. The two extremes, “always” and “never,” were kept separate while the second and third response options, “Frequently” and “very frequently,” and the fourth and fifth options, “Infrequently” and “very infrequently,” were combined to form responses of “frequently” and “infrequently” respectively.

The data and the recalculated results are displayed in Table 7 and Figure 6. Word of mouth was used most often with over 90% of the respondents saying they used it "always" or "frequently." Fliers followed word of mouth with 77% responding that they used it "always" or "frequently." SNAPline was rarely used with 80% of the respondents saying they "never" used this method. The *Collegiate Times* and television were also used less frequently than the other methods.

The combined responses were then cross-tabulated with the demographic groups to determine if there were meaningful differences by gender, class standing, and housing status. For phase I data, class standing was broken down into upper and lower class students. Freshmen and sophomores were combined into lower class students and juniors and seniors were combined to form upper class students. In phase II, the upper class students were combined with graduate students as well. The results of the chi-square tests are displayed in Table 8.

Table 7

Frequency of Usage of the Media Types By Students

Media Type	Response Options [a]						
	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)	6 N (%)	Missing N (%)
WWW	38 (23.2)	28 (17.1)	35 (21.3)	33 (20.1)	17 (10.4)	13 (7.9)	0 (0.0)
Fliers	32 (19.5)	50 (30.5)	44 (26.8)	24 (14.6)	8 (4.9)	6 (3.7)	0 (0.0)
Phone Mail	27 (16.5)	32 (19.5)	32 (19.5)	24 (14.6)	24 (14.6)	24 (14.6)	1 (0.6)
Collegiate Times	12 (7.3)	34 (20.7)	40 (24.4)	38 (23.2)	15 (9.1)	25 (15.2)	0 (0.0)
SNAPline	1 (0.6)	2 (1.2)	7 (4.3)	12 (7.3)	10 (6.1)	131 (79.9)	1 (0.6)
TV	31 (18.9)	20 (12.2)	29 (17.7)	43 (26.2)	21 (12.8)	20 (12.2)	0 (0.0)
WOM	71 (43.3)	63 (38.4)	19 (11.6)	5 (3.0)	1 (0.6)	4 (2.4)	1 (0.6)

Note. Table shows response frequencies after removal of graduate students

[a] 1 = always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = frequently; 4 = infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = never

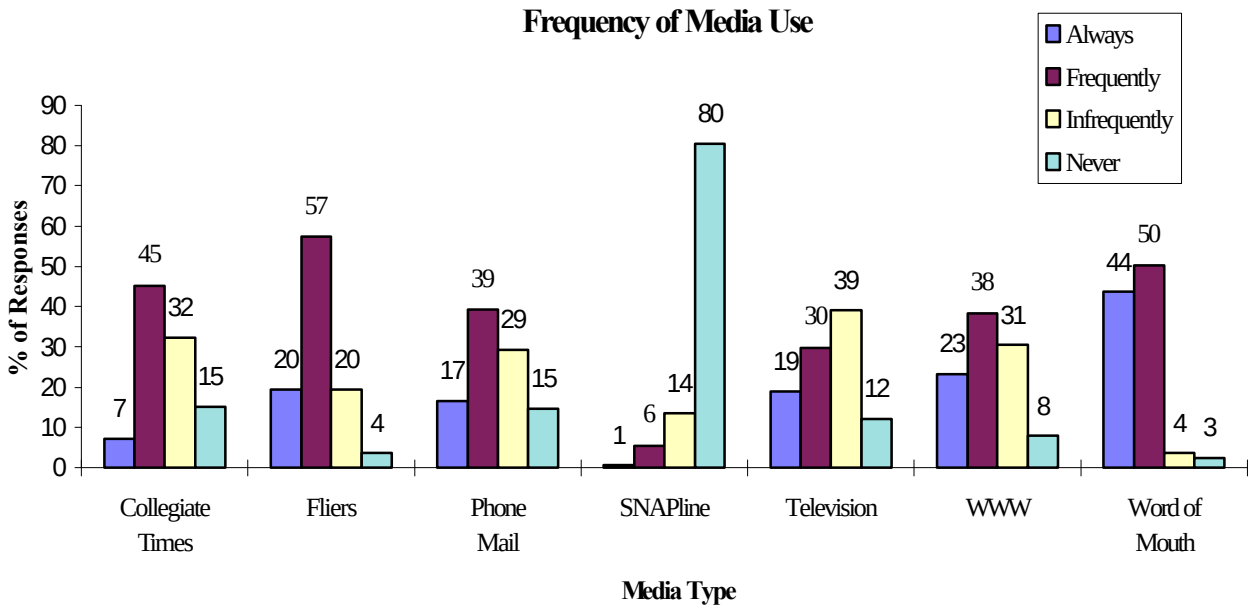

Figure 6. Frequency of use of the media types by students.

Table 8

Chi-square Results by Demographic Group

X^2 Test	df	X^2
Gender by Flier usage Women > Men	3	8.1928*
Gender by WOM usage[a] Women > Men	1	4.4527*
Class Status by CT usage Upper > Lower Class	3	9.7919*
Housing Status by CT usage Off-campus > On-campus	3	8.2124*
Housing Status by Flier usage On-campus > Off-campus	3	16.1996**

[a] Test from phase II of research

*p < .05. **p <.005.

Table 9

Percent of Positive Responses For Media Usage in Phases I & II

Research Phase	Media Type						
	WWW	Fliers	Phonemail	CT	SNAPline	TV	WOM
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Phase I N=164	61.6	76.8	55.5	52.4	6.1	48.8	93.2
Phase II N=100	9.0	74.0	20.0	17.0	0.0	0.0	70.0

Consistency

To increase the consistency of the data both the surveys asked similar questions about media usage. By comparing the responses in both phases, the replication of data can increase the confidence in the study. As there were two different response categories for the surveys, the data were compared in the following manner: The first three response options from the first phase will be combined and compared with the positive responses from the second phase and the results are displayed in Table 9.

The data show that fliers and word of mouth were both highly used to gain information about activities. Fliers had very similar values in both phases, while word of mouth had a higher usage in phase I. There is a significant difference in WWW usage in both phases, 61% in phase I compared to 9% in phase II. These differences can be explained by people not using the WWW with enough frequency for it to be considered a usual routine. Perhaps, the people who selected the WWW in the first phase were confused and marked it because they use the WWW for purposes other than student activities. In this case, the results of phase II might be more accurate.

Many of the differences in usage could be a result of the response options available during the data collection. Participants in phase I had all of the response options listed for them on the survey. The participants in the phone survey did not have these options, but were asked to recall which methods they used to gain information about activities. The results in phase II might not represent true usage patterns, but preferred usage patterns. Therefore, the participants may have used all of the methods at one point, but they rely on other media types to get their information.

Summary

This chapter presented the research data and the results of the study. There were three media types, word of mouth, the world wide web and fliers, that were viewed in a more positive frame than other methods. Students reported higher comfort levels using these methods and found them to be more informative, reliable, and easier to use than the other media types. Fliers and word of mouth were used more frequently than the other media types. There were significant differences in usage patterns between the demographic groups. Off-campus students reported using the Collegiate Times more frequently than on-campus students. The same was true for upper class students who used the Collegiate Times more than lower class students.

In addition, information was shown regarding media usage patterns of students. While fliers and word of mouth were used more frequently there were media that had very little usage such as the SNAPline and television. These results are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. The applications for practice and the implications for future research also are discussed in detail.

CHAPTER 5

Summary

The main question that drove this study asked what methods students preferred and actually used to gain information about activities. The research questions for this study were:

1. What is the level of student comfort using modern methods for obtaining information (e.g. the WWW)?
2. Which methods do students prefer to use for obtaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech?
3. Which method do students view as the easiest method of accessing information?
4. Which method do students view as the most informative method of accessing information?
5. Which method do students view as the most reliable method of accessing information?
6. Are there significant differences in usage patterns between men and women?
7. Are there significant differences in usage patterns between upper and lower class students?
8. Are there significant differences in usage patterns between on and off-campus students?

In addition, students were polled to discover the difficulty in using certain media types, how comfortable they were using the media types, and how reliable the media types were. There also was interest in any usage differences between gender, housing status, and class standing.

To address these questions the data gathering was divided into two phases. The first phase involved a survey with items that addressed the research questions. The second phase used a phone survey that provided supporting data for the first phase of research. The response frequencies were analyzed for patterns among the students who responded. Both phases of research collected the demographic information used later in the analysis. The reported frequency

of usage was compared with the demographic groups and chi-square tests were used to assess differences between the groups.

There were only a few differences that existed between groups that were strong enough to be considered significant. Upper class students and off-campus students reported using the *Collegiate Times* more than their counterparts. Women reported using word of mouth and fliers more often than did men. Other findings suggested that most students feel comfortable using the world wide web as a source of information. Students also preferred using the world wide web to learn about activities and found it to be one of the more reliable methods of gathering information. Word of mouth, fliers and the world wide web were consistent favorites across several categories. The students preferred using them, found them easy to use and stated that these methods were more informative and reliable than other methods.

Interpretation of Findings

Of the media types that are available for student use there were three clear favorites: fliers, word of mouth, and the world wide web. These methods were preferred the most, were perceived as the easiest to use, and were thought to be the most informative of the media types. Ease of accessibility may account for these preferences.

The world wide web was seen as the most informative and students reported they were most comfortable using this media type. One of the questions on the survey inquired about peoples' access to the world wide web. Of the 163 participants who responded 89% reported that they had access now and nearly 90% reported that they would have access within a year. With so many students using this media type, and feeling comfortable using it, there is a potential for using this source as an advertising avenue.

Fliers also were considered to be the most reliable media type available by the students. Advertisements on fliers are scattered all across campus and it is very simple to walk by a bulletin board and notice a flier advertising an event that looks interesting. With fliers, all of the information is right there for the taking and dates, times, and locations are all presented in a quick and concise manner. Word of mouth also allows the quick communication of important facts. Friends can easily discuss information about events that are potentially interesting. There is an added bonus to using word of mouth as friends are familiar with each other and can alert each other to events that may be considered interesting.

With some of the other methods studied the time commitment for their use is greater. Methods such as television, phone mail, and the *Collegiate Times* require students to break their activity and invest time in these mediums. Some students might not want to invest that much time when they can just as easily look at bulletin boards. If more students used the SNAPline, they might find the pace a little slow and troublesome. Contrasted with the world wide web, the information comes up much faster on the screen, and the point and click interface allows a quick perusal of all information. With television, you must wait around for the information to scroll to the item you are looking for or you must be lucky enough to catch an announcement on television just as it appears on the screen.

The results of the comparison of demographic groups demonstrated that more upper class students use the *Collegiate Times* than lower class students. This could be due to the length of time at this institution. Having been here longer they are more familiar with the *Collegiate Times* and know where to look for activities within the paper. Perhaps the lower class students are more interested in finding out about activities that are not advertised in the *Collegiate Times* or are unsure how it can be used as a source of information. In addition, off-campus students reported

using the *Collegiate Times* more than on-campus students. This may be a result of the amount of time off-campus students spend on-campus. They come to campus to attend their classes and then leave which minimizes the amount of time they are exposed to other media types on-campus. They can, however, pick up a copy of the *Collegiate Times* and read it at their leisure. This could also be a result of more upper class students living off-campus.

Implications

The literature that was available for this study was mainly theory based or a professional's view on how best to reach students and communicate activities information to them. This study adds to relevant research as it measures the patterns of media usage in a university setting. The results of this study are, of course, relevant to this institution. But they can be used as an example for other such colleges or universities. The article by Wilmes and Quade examined the art of promoting events for commuter students. In particular, they mentioned the difficulties involved in connecting with this diverse group. Some of the comments made by participants in this study strike a common chord with this article by mentioning their concerns about event advertisements.

Many of these concerns are detailed in the applications section below. While the literature described some of the problems that commuter students face it should be noted that the students who live off-campus do not completely fall into that category. The students who attend Virginia Tech and who live off-campus are mostly residential students. They live very close to campus and are full time students. Much of the research pertains to campuses where the commuter population lives at home and are possibly part-time who work full time.

Further research can be done that examines whether certain groups prefer a specific media type to learn about activities. If this information could be established, then professionals in student

activities could construct their marketing strategies around specific media types to better reach their target population. A useful research design to examine this problem could include advertising a program using a single medium and surveying the attendees to discover how they learned about the program. Another research design could have a survey that would allow students multiple responses on media usage. This would allow researchers to examine combinations of media types used in advertising activities. These small steps would be beneficial in maximizing the efforts of a student activities division.

Applications

A large section (approximately twenty) of those who made comments wanted to see fliers better used in advertising. Some of the residence hall areas were lacking in advertisements. The Veterinary school and other academic buildings were believed to be lacking in sufficient advertisements. Others felt that the dining halls were also lacking in advertisements. Several people just wanted to see more fliers being used. Regardless of where the fliers were placed people wanted the bulletin boards to be better cared for. This could include regular cleanings of the boards to remove outdated fliers. This removal would make the current fliers easier to see and people would not feel so overwhelmed by fliers when passing these boards. Better organization of the boards also would reduce the amount of confusion that is present with advertisements as some people place multiple fliers on boards and often cover up other advertisements in the process.

A small (approximately ten to fifteen), but vocal, section of the participants felt that off-campus students were neglected when it came to advertising activities. They wanted to see a useful method of advertising that was directed at this population. Several methods are available for advertising that would impact the off-campus student population. Signs can be posted on the

local buses and a bus stops as many students use this service to commute. Advertisements could be placed in areas that commuter students frequent such as on-campus dining facilities, fast food restaurants, and buildings that house classes for upper class students as many of them live off-campus. Programs could be advertised in classes before they begin by having overheads posted or by having a representative come and discuss the program.

Another means of reaching the commuter population would involve a dedicated section in the *Collegiate Times* for activities or for commuter students and activities and services available to them. A section dedicated to coming attractions and better coverage of activities would both be advantageous. Used in conjunction with a well placed advertising campaign, many students would learn about this new section and would begin to use it regularly. Some respondents offered comments suggesting that a calendar of events posted in a common place would be beneficial to some, or perhaps a direct mailing of an activities calendar to students would be advantageous.

A suggestion, from five to ten participants, was made to dedicate certain locations on-campus for advertisements of activities. This place should be in a common area and should be updated regularly. Other suggestions involved creative marketing techniques, such as having people walk around wearing sandwich boards that advertise activities. Some long term suggestions involved small “teasers” that mention a coming event but do not give away too much information. This makes people curious about coming events and the creativity of the method stays on people's minds longer. One person advocated using door prizes to attract people to events.

There were several comments, made by approximately 15 participants, about better advertising and targeting certain areas. The comments generally fell into four areas. The first area concerned applying technology to advertise events. Some felt that the world wide web access

could be improved. That it should be easier to access from the Virginia Tech homepage and have better links to other areas. Another suggestion involved advertisements being placed directly on the Virginia Tech homepage. Others felt that electronic mail was the solution. This included a listserv for campus events and general electronic mail sent out for activities.

Conclusions

The marketing literature emphasized the need for strategic planning that includes understanding the needs and desires of the target audience and tailoring the marketing plan to address them. In planning the advertising campaign the selection of media depends on using media that will maximize the exposure of the target audience to the service or product that is being marketed. The experts also recommend a mix of the various media that are available to help maximize exposure. A media mix is key as using only one media type can minimize exposure and increase the chance the marketing strategy will fail.

For commuter students, whose time on campus may be concentrated in one geographic area of the campus, a media mix can be most beneficial. Greater coverage increase the odds that the advertisement will reach this somewhat isolated population. This type of research can prove invaluable to campus activities professionals as it serves as marketing research. By knowing which media types the target population use with regularity, the advertisers can make the most of their advertising budget.

This research can also show which media are developing and which are being used with less regularity. Colleges and universities are becoming more technologically oriented. Services such as the world wide web and electronic mail are becoming more popular among students and, therefore, present an opportunity for development. Placing advertisements on the world wide web

is generally free and can be accessed twenty-four hours a day. By making students aware the location of the web site, and designing a site that is visually appealing and interesting to visit, a campus activities department can increase their visibility and reach a wider audience.

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Appendix A

Directions: All questions refer to student activities at Virginia Tech. Activities include programs and events such as plays, concerts, movie, speakers, etc. (excluding student organization meetings and fraternity and sorority events). **Signify your answer by blackening the appropriate circle.**

The **SNAP line** is an automated information service sponsored by University Unions and Student Activities that can be accessed through a telephone.
WWW stands for world wide web.

***** Each question number corresponds to the same answer number *****

1. Class level (1) Freshman (2) Sophomore (3) Junior (4) Senior (5) Grad
2. Where do you live? (1) on campus (2) off campus
3. What is your gender? (1) Male (2) Female

Please rate each of these methods for gaining information according to your level of comfort using them by this scale:

1 - Very comfortable 4 - less than comfortable 7 - Have Never Used
2 - Comfortable 5 - Uncomfortable
3 - slightly comfortable 6 - Very uncomfortable

4. WWW
5. Fliers
6. Phone Mail
7. The *Collegiate Times*
8. SNAP line
9. Television

Please rate how often you use the following sources for obtaining information about activities here at Virginia Tech according to this scale:

1 - always 4 - infrequently
2 - very frequently 5 - very infrequently
3 - frequently 6 - never

10. WWW
11. Fliers
12. Phone Mail
13. The *Collegiate Times*
14. SNAP line
15. Television
16. Word of Mouth

Please rate how informative these methods of accessing information are using this scale:

1 - Very informative 4 - Slightly uninformative 7 - Have Never Used
2 - Informative 5 - Uninformative
3 - Slightly informative 6 - Very uninformative

17. WWW
18. Fliers
19. Phone Mail
20. The *Collegiate Times*
21. SNAP line

22. Television
23. Word of Mouth

OVER PLEASE

Please rate the reliability of these methods for gaining information about student activities at Virginia Tech using this scale:

1 - Very reliable
2 - Reliable
3 - Slightly reliable
4 - Slightly unreliable
5 - Unreliable
6 - Very unreliable
7 - Have Never Used

25. WWW
26. Fliers
27. Phone Mail
28. The *Collegiate Times*
29. SNAP line
30. Television
31. Word of Mouth

Rank these seven sources of information according to your preferences for using them from 1 (Most Prefer) to 7 (Least prefer).

32. WWW
33. Fliers
34. Phone Mail
35. The *Collegiate Times*
36. SNAP line
37. Television
38. Word of Mouth

Rank these seven sources of information from 1 (Easiest to use) to 7 (Hardest to use).

39. WWW
40. Fliers
41. Phone Mail
42. The *Collegiate Times*
43. SNAP line
44. Television
45. Word of Mouth

46. Do you have convenient access to the world wide web? (1) Yes (2) No
47. Will you have access within a year? (1) Yes (2) No

Please use the space provided to give any suggestions you might have to improve the way information is distributed about campus activities.

Appendix B

1. Class level (1) Freshman (2) Sophomore (3) Junior (4) Senior (5) Grad
2. location (1) on campus (2) off campus
3. gender (1) Male (2) Female

4. How many programs or events did you attend last semester **excluding student organization meetings**?

1) 0
2) 1-2
3) 3-4
4) 5-6
5) 7-8
6) 9+

What kinds of programs were they? (Code 1 if attended and 2 if not mentioned)

5. Concerts
6. Plays
7. Musicals
8. Comedy
9. Speakers
10. Cultural events
11. Athletic/Sporting events

12. Other _____

What methods do you use to gain information about these and other events at Virginia Tech? (Code (1) if used and (2) if not mentioned)

13. WWW
14. Fliers
15. Phone Mail
16. The Collegiate Times
17. SNAP line
18. Television
19. Word of Mouth

20. Other _____

What suggestions can you offer for improving the promotion of events?

Paul M. Dolezel

OBJECTIVE To obtain work in the field of residence life

EDUCATION

MA, Education - College Student Affairs **May 1997**
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University Blacksburg, VA
Coursework Included:
Student Development theory Programmatic Interventions
Counseling Techniques Social Psychology and Group Dynamics

BS, Psychology **December 1994**
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University Blacksburg, VA

TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE

- Experienced in both Macintosh and PC use
- Skilled in the use of HTML and web site maintenance
- Knowledge of various computer languages including Pascal, C+, and Visual C++

Independent Study **Summer 1996**
Virginia Tech Blacksburg, VA

- Constructed a web site for a professor in the College of Human Resources and Education
- Site was designed to be an extension of a class allowing the students to participate in activities from their own computers
- Included were class materials and links to other sites for use in an educational environment

EXPERIENCE

Graduate Student Assembly (GSA)

University Council **Fall 1996 - Present**

- Worked with university administrators, faculty members and student organization leaders to review and develop university policies
- Addressed issues important to the graduate student population and to the functioning of the university
- Selected by the Executive Board of the GSA to serve as their representative

125th Anniversary Committee **Spring 1996 - Present**

- Nominated by the President of the GSA to serve on a committee which was comprised of representatives of the academic colleges, staff, administrators and student representatives
- Chartered by the President of the university to develop plans for celebrating the anniversary of Virginia Tech
- Represented the views of the Graduate Student Assembly during the planning of events

Graduate Student Assembly

Executive Assistant / Graduate Assistant **1995 - 1996**

- Assisted in planning activities for graduate students such as research symposiums, graduate and professional school fairs, and social activities
- Assembled necessary materials for delegate meetings and aided the officers in their administrative duties
- Maintained an electronic mail listserv for the GSA and facilitated communication with the delegates

Residential & Dining Programs

Graduate Hall Director **Fall 1996**

- Managed a Residence Hall of over 100 residents; Supervised one staff member
- Provided programming and activities for residents and served as a liaison to the university
- Worked with other staff members to provide programs for the all the buildings in the community and for the resident advisor staff
- Responsible for upkeep of building and processing maintenance requests

Practicum - Resident Advisor Training **Spring 1996**

- Served as a facilitator for the large group training sessions
- Evaluated the progress of the trainees by their homework and class participation
- Created an interactive training program that could be accessed through the World Wide Web
- Developed a questionnaire for class participants to use in evaluating the training course

Research Group Chair **Spring 1996**

- Worked with fellow students to evaluate the resident advisor system
- Interviewed the professional staff and half the student staff to gather data about the resident advisor system using focus groups
- Compiled the various reports of the other team members and served as editor of the final report
- Presented the findings to the Director of Residence Education and members of the Institutional Research Department

Resident Advisor **1994**

- Organized and facilitated social, cultural and educational programming
- Motivated and fostered interaction among 40-50 residents on the hall
- Aided and assisted residents in resolving personal and academic issues
- Implemented policies according to university guidelines