

MARKET SURVEY

Prepared for OIS -- Spring, 1987

This first draft has been prepared upon completion of an informal market survey conducted during the winter and spring semesters, 1987. The market survey was completed as an initial effort toward understanding the potential market within the immediate area for students needing or desiring courses offered by the Office Information Systems discipline of Oakland Community College.

Statement of the Problem

The major impetus for the survey was a continuing decline in enrollment in OIS courses across the college. A new curriculum with emphasis on microcomputer courses for users and a more appropriate shorthand system were implemented in January, 1987; while the enrollment decline was stabilized, there was not a substantial increase in enrollment that would indicate the beginning of a reversal in the downward trend of the OIS student population.

Thus, several questions were raised:

Can any part of the decline in enrollment be related to a decline in employment in occupations served by OIS?

Can any part of the decline in enrollment be related to a societal trend among women that would move them away from a career in occupational areas served by OIS?

Is the OIS curriculum, as implemented, appropriate for the needs of the community?

Is there a potential student population for this program? If so, where is that population located?

Is the potential population aware of what OIS at OCC is offering?

What marketing techniques can be employed to reach the potential market?

Are there any other factors that can be identified as playing a role in the enrollment decline in OIS?

#### Review of the Literature

The evidence is plentiful and well documented that the need for support workers in office environments will continue to be strong for the foreseeable future. Therefore, no major effort was made to further validate that belief. A brief look at projections from Occupational Outlook Handbook will suffice.

Two related statistics have relevancy for this discussion. First, the civilian work force is expected to grow from 110 million persons in 1982 to 131 million by 1995--a 19 percent increase. Second, women will account for nearly two-thirds of the labor force growth during this period. This figure is particularly significant in light of the fact that the OIS student population is overwhelmingly female. Fox/Hesse-Biber report that clerical work is the largest single occupational category in which women are employed.<sup>2</sup>

A second relevant statistic appeared in a recent article in The Detroit Free Press. The writer predicted that unemployment in 1995 would be 25 percent. Again, the Handbook helps us relate this information to the importance of community college education. Unemployment rates in relationship to educational level attained are as follows:

College graduates: 5.6%

One-three years of college: 9.6%

High school graduates: 15.5%

Less than 4 years of high school, 32.2 %.

Mr. Wayne Maya, vice-president of South-Western Publishing Company, emphasized in a keynote address to business educators recently held at Eastern Michigan University that 80 percent of the jobs of the future will not require a four-year degree.

To focus specifically on employment prospects for the occupational area served by OIS, again the Handbook is used as the source:

(for SECRETARIES & STENOGRAPHERS)

Employment of secretaries is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations...(but) an exceptionally large number of jobs will be available through the mid-1990s...employment of stenographers is expected to decline. Demand for skilled shorthand reporters should remain strong (p. 211).<sup>3</sup>

The professional literature of business educators contains many statements like the following:

Enrollments in business education programs continue to decrease while the Occupational Outlook Handbook and other job forecasts predict that job opportunities in the administrative support area are greater than any other area of the work force...The pool of students is

continually shrinking because of declining population and the feminist movement and because students are being counseled and encouraged to enter alternate career fields.<sup>4</sup>

### The Process

The greater interest for this survey was in determining whether a definable potential population for OIS could be identified in Oakland County. To do this in the time allotted, the population to be surveyed was divided into three groups:

- A. High school students.
- B. Adults enrolling in OCC courses preparing to re-enter the job market.
- C. Employed persons seeking training or re-training.

Since the more serious enrollment decline has occurred among day students, the first efforts were directed toward the first two groups.

High School Students -- A list of all Oakland County high schools was obtained from the intermediate school district. These names were written on slips of paper and were drawn randomly. The only variation to random selection was that the eight schools must be representative of the four college service areas. Thus, when a third school was drawn in the same service area, it was rejected. Then, a list of all business educators was used to select one name from each of the high schools. The only procedure I observed in selecting teachers was to avoid persons whom I knew through professional contacts. This process resulted in the following high schools and business teachers being selected.

Ferndale	Rosemary Simmons
Southfield Lathrup	Joseph Hadded
Clawson	Jerry Glidewell
Waterford Kettering	Beverly Gidcumb
Clarenceville	Leo Kinsella
Pontiac Central	Katie Dill
Northwest Oakland Voc. Center	Louise Duby

Avondale High School was also selected but due to schedule conflicts, the teacher and I were not able to arrange a time to meet.

Each of these teachers was called and was if he/she were willing to participate. No teacher refused to cooperate; in fact, all of them were very positive toward participating in the survey. Each teacher was also asked to arrange to have a senior student currently enrolled in at least one business class available for a student interview. Attachments A and B summarize the responses of business teachers and students at the selected high schools. The teachers were assured that they would not be identified in any way, so the attachments omit any direct references to specific schools.

My observations for each of the three target populations are based both on the summaries of the surveys and on intuitive feelings resulting from conducting the survey.

#### OBSERVATIONS--Attachment A

1. OCC enjoys wide recognition among Oakland County business teachers. At the same time, there is virtually no knowledge of the OIS program; the title OIS itself is unrecognized. Business teachers have little or no information regarding course offerings.
2. Business teachers generally do not think of OCC first when advising students regarding further studies.

3. An impression gained by the interviewer and not apparent from the survey results is that business teachers are relatively uninformed about post-secondary education. For instance, the question asked related to a student's continuing his/her office occupations education and none of the four-year colleges recommended by the teachers any longer have such programs.
4. Some of the teachers alluded to recommending OCC for the less capable student. While we recognize and welcome the "open door" as a door of opportunity for many students, is the open door construed to be primarily for this category of student? Are academically talented students encouraged to look at all of the options including OCC, particularly in light of the cost of higher education today?
5. Three of the seven teachers cited past efforts of OCC to recruit OIS students. They expressed a desire to see such efforts renewed.
6. Oakland Schools has made a concerted effort to provide information to all business educators regarding articulation. Yet only one teacher was aware of such an agreement.
7. There were no negative comments or impressions of OCC. The College is missing a valuable opportunity to build upon a well-established, positive image.

#### OBSERVATIONS--Attachment B

1. Like their teachers, students are very aware of OCC as an local institution but almost totally lack information about the advantages of continuing their education there.
2. A general impression I had was a genuine interest on the part of the students with whom I talked but a very vague knowledge of how to proceed.
3. The community college with its outstanding programs has not been sold to Oakland County high school students, particularly business students.
4. Having taught high school for several years, I know it is difficult to change the minds of students regarding unrealistic plans and ambitions. At the same time students need to be encouraged to think about continuing their education on a part-time basis and/or to plan to begin college at a later date, which our experience tells us many of them do. Perhaps if this foundation were laid during the high school years, more of them would enroll prior to a life or job crisis, as is the case with many of our students.

After surveying business teachers and students, four counselors representing the four service areas were invited to the Orchard Ridge Campus for lunch. This group included:

Richard Wilson	North Farmington High School
Patrick Stemas	Royal Oak Dondero High School
Richard Bohl	Milford High School
Mitzi Evland	Avondale High School

An informal discussion of their perceptions of OCC and its recruiting efforts suggests the following:

1. There is the possibility of wide variances in the perceptions of counselors and classroom teachers. The counselors felt that their respective levels of familiarity with the OCC campus nearest their schools were very high.
2. The counselors reacted very strongly to the lack of recruitment effort on the part of OCC. While they feel very positive toward OCC, their promotional efforts are hampered by a lack of printed materials for distribution, a lack of personal contact by college personnel, and an overall lack of advertising on the part of the college. They further suggested that the college catalog is not "reader friendly." They suggested that the programs be laid out in sequence rather than by groups such as General Education, Required Supportive, etc.
3. They suggested that an OCC contact person become visible by dropping in periodically to review the status of available materials and to answer any questions counselors may have.
4. They concurred that the recognition factor of OIS is nil. In discussing this further, they also have noticed a general decline in the "secretarial image" and feel that this may have a bearing on declining enrollment.
5. They concurred with the allusions of many teachers to OCC being for the less capable. They mentioned the term "Grade 13" as being a part of the students' perceptions.

Recommendation: After meeting with these three groups of persons, I believe that high school students have been "written off" too quickly as potential OIS students. While they may not be available in the numbers that they once were, they still represent

a viable group for recruiting. Major changes in the approach to this market must be made. Some suggested courses of action are as follows:

1. A faculty or staff person must be given the specific responsibility for taking the OIS message to each of the Oakland County high schools each year.
2. A faculty or staff person must be given the time to prepare a first-rate program to be offered on the campuses for area high schools.
3. A faculty or staff person must be given the time to prepare a program of interest to area high school business teachers to bring them onto the respective campuses.
4. Oakland Schools personnel are anxious to update an articulation agreement with OCC. This should be a top priority for Fall, 1987, for implementation in the spring.
5. Attractive OIS recruitment posters and literature should be mailed to each of the area high school business departments. These items should provide specific sources for obtaining further information.
6. OCC must improve its public relations efforts in every area. OIS will not be the last academic area to experience enrollment difficulties unless major steps are taken to improve the college's outreach activities.

#### OBSERVATIONS--Attachment C

The second group to be surveyed was the returning adult. Surveys were sent to each of the four campuses. OIS faculty members were asked to identify up to ten students currently enrolled in OIS classes whom they would categorize as returning to school for the purpose of re-entering the job market. Thirty four responses were received. Four of the students were interviewed at length regarding their perceptions.



Again, the purpose was to learn as much as possible about the "typical" returning student for the purpose of determining whether there were ways that this potential market could be reached.

Although further studies would be needed to establish a valid description, these results would indicate that the returning student within the OIS program is a female, over 45 years of age, and married. Typically, she has worked in an office support position previously and is a high school graduate. She tends to select OCC on the basis of location.

1. To the credit of the OIS faculty, the returning student has a high regard for the college. She is very complimentary of the level of assistance provided by the faculty.
2. This group is also the most critical of the three groups. Numerous items of dissatisfaction were cited, as listed on the attachment.
3. Returning women also tend to be the most verbal in discussing their likes and dislikes. They tend to be very aware of their age and their lack of current job skills. Their lack of self esteem is often demonstrated in abrasive responses. A closer working relationship between OIS and the Women's Center needs to be established. This would be beneficial to both students and faculty.
4. I strongly believe there is a potential market within this group for future enrollment. How do we reach them?
  - a. Mail -- Several of them mentioned the number of flyers they receive from competing schools. Perhaps this awareness is indicative of their having the time to read their mail. This market is virtually untapped for the college and individual campuses. Each campus should seriously consider mailing a flyer covering the occupational courses offered locally. Further study should be done comparing the relative value of mailing college-wide information vs. specific program/course information.
  - b. Agencies -- Further studies should be conducted with the temporary agencies for the purpose of identifying the critical training needs of temporary job applicants. An OIS faculty member would be the most desirable person

to make this initial contact. The intricacies of employment practices in the office support area is best interpreted by such a person. Establishing a regular contact with temporary employment agencies could result in their recommending OIS to potential employees who lack the appropriate skills.

One student reported that MESC recommends a proprietary school to its clients. A contact should be established as quickly as possible. This comment is not referring to the obtaining of governmental training contracts. Rather it refers to potential students who are eligible for educational assistance and who will enroll in ongoing classes.

Another student commented that the financial assistance available from the college is virtually unknown. Her question was, "Why don't you publicize it?" My question is, "Why don't we?"

#### OBSERVATIONS--Attachment D

The third group surveyed was that of area businesses. Two changes were made in the original plan: (1) To categorize businesses by size, and (2) To survey businesses representative of the four service areas. The first change appeared to be unrealistic for a survey of this scope. The second change was necessitated by time and by the fact that further consideration seemed to indicate that the employment practices of large corporations really do not vary greatly. There was also a desire to contact businesses within the immediate vicinity of Orchard Ridge; it was felt that this should be a prime consideration.

Because employment practices are a highly sensitive issue, I assured each of the persons interviewed that there would be no identification of them or their company in the reporting of the results. For information purposes only and in no identifiable order, the companies I interviewed were:

Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Company  
IBM Corporation  
Eaton Corporation  
Firemen's Fund  
National Bank of Detroit  
Shearson Lehmann  
Jervis B. Webb

(NOTE: I also interviewed the employment director of Maccabees Mutual Insurance but have inadvertently misplaced my notes. The findings from MMI are consistent with those reported from the other companies.)

1. The most important observation to come from this group was the warm reception I received in all of the businesses. The people I interviewed were very busy people with heavy responsibilities, and yet they welcomed the opportunity to cooperate with the campus and the college.
2. Employment testing is undergoing drastic changes. Each of the persons interviewed cited EEOC as being responsible for their updated procedures. In many cases, less testing is being done because of the requirement that tests be validated. This has three implications: For the potential employee, particularly students, this can be a negative factor because more emphasis is being placed on past experience, something many of our day students lack. On the positive side, it should result in growth for our internship program. Also on the positive side, this may be an area in which we could perform a service for area businesses. We have the expertise to validate tests. This is an area that should be explored in the future.
3. While all but one of the businesses surveyed have a major commitment to training including an in-house facility, all of them freely admitted that they also seek and use outside assistance. The frequent mention of their approving employee attendance at the seminars advertised by mail suggests that they do not have a well-developed plan for employee training. This has strong implications for developing an permanent relationship between OIS and BPI. The possibility of one faculty member working with BPI on an ongoing, in-load basis should be explored.
4. Several of the persons interviewed expressed an interest in receiving information about course offerings. They expressed strong interest in the new OIS curriculum. Through their tuition reimbursement programs, they are happy to disseminate such information among employees.
5. This is a potential market that we are missing almost entirely. There is a felt need for upgrading of skills. The complete OIS program should be presented to the indi-

viduals I interviewed as well as to persons in similar positions in the rapidly growing office complexes of our area. Again, an OIS faculty member is the best person to do this; time is the key. Alternative scheduling practices should be explored. Both on-site and on-campus courses should be studied.

#### OBSERVATIONS--Attachment E

A final consideration was to develop a profile of the student who enrolled in the new OIS courses in January, 1987.

1. I found it interesting that the majority of the students were returning students. This implies that we continue to fail in efforts to reach a new student population, who represent the future of OIS. This would appear to emphasize again the critical need for a major public relations effort.
2. I was pleasantly surprised by the number of students who are interested in pursuing an associate's degree. Even though the students were almost evenly divided between those pursuing a degree and those taking isolated courses, this factor would seem to indicate that we have a larger current population than suspected. The question is, How many of these students do we eventually lose due to discouragement caused by cancelled classes--a factor frequently cited in informal student conversations?

However, it is interesting to note that all of the students pursuing an associate's degree are in one of the occupational areas. This would seem to have strong implications for the academic areas. Where are the accounting students who will be forced to use the computer on their jobs? Where are the English students who hope to use the computer to facilitate their writing? It must not be forgotten that the OIS faculty are best qualified to assist all students in developing their basic computer technology skills in preparation for applying them to specific areas.

4. Another surprising figure was the almost 50 percent of the students who elected courses for "personal interest." While the figures are not segregated by courses, an assumption is that these are primarily the microcomputer courses. Again, information we have gathered from the competition would indicate that we are doing a better job in terms of course content, faculty commitment and experience, and cost. The number of persons pursuing

these courses should grow phenomenally if information about them is disseminated.

5. The residency and employment location information tends to strengthen the earlier suggestions for a "mail blitz" of the immediate area. It is important to remember that once information is available, the "network" of neighbors and friends will appear. Perhaps there is no information for the network at this time.

### CONCLUSION

The opportunity to conduct this survey is evidence of a new spirit of commitment and cooperation demonstrated by the president of one campus. This survey should represent only a beginning for both Orchard Ridge and the other three campuses. Ongoing data collection should be a priority.

Further studies should include a continuation of the data gathered in this one on a broader base. A study of the improved retention rates in new OIS classes should be conducted as soon as possible.

A major college-wide commitment of faculty time should be made to promoting OIS. The OIS faculty members have performed "above and beyond the call of duty" willingly and cheerfully because they are professionals who believe in their mission. It is now time to recognize those efforts by providing the appropriate support mechanism. The cause is not OIS's alone; when a major discipline such as OIS has a healthy enrollment, other areas are also enriched by the increased numbers of student.

There is a future for OIS; there can, in fact, be a bright future. To permit any other future to emerge is irresponsible. A commitment to the future is needed NOW.

#### REFERENCES

Fox, Mary Frank, and Hesse-Biber, Sharlene. WOMEN AT WORK. Mayfield Publishing Co., 1984, p. 125.

Dorsett, Katie G. and Tucker, Shirley H. "Wanted: Business Education Students." BUSINESS EDUCATION FORUM, April 1984, Vol. 38, No. 7.

Hoyt, Kenneth B. "How the Work Turns: Tomorrow's Jobs and Business Education." A Report of the Proceedings and Recommendations from the National Conference on The Future of Business Education. Cincinnati, 1985.

United States Department of Labor (1984). OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK: 1984-85 EDITION. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office.

Copies of other pertinent articles are included in the back of the report.