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**FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED ENROLLMENT IN THE
FIRM PROGRAM AT BETHEL HIGH SCHOOL**

A Research Paper Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the
Department of Occupational and Technical Studies at
Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science in Business and Industry Training

By
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July 2003

APPROVAL PAGE

This research paper was prepared by Susan Carroll under the direction of Dr. John Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Education. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science.

Approved by: John M. Ritz 7-21-03
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the educational goals of any industrial nation is to have a skilled and trained pool of workers. Schools have long accepted that one of their roles is to prepare students for work. However, the changing U.S economy has necessitated a change in the way students are prepared for work. The United States has seen its economy shift from a manufacturing-based economy where productivity was fundamental, to a service or information-based economy where problem-solving and behavioral skills are essential (Carnevale, 2001). According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) "...the top 10 qualities employers seek have little to do with technical skills and a lot to do with personality and attitude. Employers want team players with great verbal and written communication skills, honesty and integrity, interpersonal skills, motivation and initiative, a strong work ethic, and analytical skills" (Wallis, 2001, np). The skills these employers are referring to are often called "soft skills", and they are necessary to survive in today's competitive workplace. As many employers will agree, technical skills can be taught to a person with the right attitude and work ethic.

One of the biggest complaints of employers today is the work ethic of their employees. The 2000 National Employer Survey (NES), sponsored by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement and the consortium for Policy Research in Education and administered by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, found that high school "graduates scored lowest in terms of their work ethic and willingness to take responsibility... a dramatic 43 percent of employers believed that high school graduates were poorly or very poorly prepared by high schools to handle the responsibilities of the

workplace” (Employers: A Report to Stakeholders, 2002, np). The lack of a well-developed work ethic among many recently hired individuals has devastating consequences to productivity and seriously compromises the quality of work. The question remains how do we reverse this trend? How do we promote a strong work ethic among our high school students and help them develop the soft skills necessary to secure employment in today’s competitive employment environment?

A recently acquired program in the Business Education Department at Bethel High School, called THE FIRM, is attempting to reverse this trend among its students. THE FIRM helps develop the work ethic of young people by promoting independence, responsibility, teamwork, and professional development. THE FIRM is an elective course offered through the Business Education Department of Hampton City Schools. It is a competency-based program taught in a professional, simulated business environment for students desiring workplace experience and general office or computer skills. Core competencies include word processing, spreadsheet software, time management, goal setting, written and oral communication skills, work ethics, and professional development. The approach is aimed at empowering students and requires students to be self-motivated and self-directed. Students are expected to take responsibility for their learning and prioritize their work each day. Upon completion of the program, students are expected to have the necessary skills, confidence, and attitude to enter the world of work.

Since every student will hopefully become a member of the workforce, the skills taught in THE FIRM will have a tremendous impact on the employability of Bethel High School students. If business educators can understand why students chose as an elective

to enroll in THE FIRM, the program's attractiveness to students can be enhanced and appropriate recruitment strategies developed. It is the purpose of this research study to determine the factors that influenced students to enroll in THE FIRM.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine the factors that influenced students in the Business Department at Bethel High School to enroll in the program titled THE FIRM.

RESEARCH GOALS

To help answer this problem, the following goals were developed:

1. Determine the reasons students enrolled in THE FIRM.
2. Determine who influences students' decisions to enroll in THE FIRM.
3. Recommend future recruitment strategies for THE FIRM.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Bethel High School's mission "...is to provide a positive, multicultural environment in which each student will have the opportunity to obtain the skills necessary to become a productive, self-supporting, concerned citizen in our global society" (<http://www.sbo.hampton.k12.v.us/HighSchools/bethel/index.html>). THE FIRM was implemented at Bethel High School because the program's content strategically aligned with the mission of the school. THE FIRM has been offered as an elective course at Bethel High School for the last four years. During this time, no information has been

collected to ascertain the reasons students choose to enroll in this particular program. This research study will collect the necessary data to provide teachers of this program with this much-needed information.

Understanding the reasons students choose to enroll in THE FIRM has important consequences to the program's future success. Since an elective course depends on student interest and enrollment for its survival, recognizing what motivates a student to choose a particular elective course can help teachers improve the program to make it more attractive to students. Understanding the basis for their decisions also allows an effective recruitment strategy to be devised to ensure the program's continued viability.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study included the following:

- The survey collects data covering a two-year period from school year 2001-2002 to 2002-2003.
- The sample was limited to Bethel High School students.
- The sample was limited to approximately 100 students.

ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions were made concerning this research study:

- Students are either currently enrolled in THE FIRM or completed a year of THE FIRM last year.
- Students completing the survey will represent all three courses taught in THE FIRM.

- The results of the survey would be useful for recruitment at Bethel High School.

PROCEDURES

The data for this study were collected from Bethel High School students currently enrolled in THE FIRM and from current 12th graders who completed THE FIRM during the 2001-2002 academic school year. A survey was developed to determine the factors that influenced Bethel High School students to enroll in THE FIRM. Prior to distribution of the survey, students were given an explanation of the purpose of the survey. The surveys were collected and the results tabulated to determine why students enrolled in THE FIRM and what recruitment efforts could be applied to ensure continued success of the program.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms were defined to aid the reader:

THE FIRM: a high school elective course offered through the Business Education Department of Hampton City Schools.

Recruit: to encourage students to enroll in a course.

Elective Course: a course that a student may choose to take in order to earn credit toward graduation requirements.

Business Education: a program of study for high school students interested in business and information technology and their related careers.

Enroll: to insert, register, or enter in a list, catalog, or roll.

OVERVIEW

Chapter I has provided the reader with a framework from which to understand the background and significance for this research study. The research problem focused on determining the factors that influenced students in the Business Department at Bethel High School to enroll in a program titled THE FIRM. Research goals were directed toward understanding the reasons and influences of why students select THE FIRM as an elective, and what recruitment strategies could be developed from this information.

Chapter II will present a review of the literature relevant to Career and Technical Education including enrollment issues, marketing strategies, and business and industry needs. Chapter III will review the methods and procedure used to conduct this research study, while Chapter IV will present the findings of this research study. The results of the survey will be analyzed and its findings reported as to the factors that influenced students to enroll in THE FIRM.

Chapter V will summarize the findings of the research and include recommendations supported by the collected data. This chapter will help teachers of THE FIRM to better understand the factors that influenced students to enroll in these courses. The recommendations offered should aid Bethel High School Business Education teachers of THE FIRM in developing both a better program and an effective student recruitment strategy.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will present a review of relevant literature as it pertains to the topic of this research – to determine the factors that influenced students in the Business Department at Bethel High School to enroll in the program titled THE FIRM. This review of literature will focus on career and technical education, history of THE FIRM, trends in enrollment, factors that influence enrollment, and recruitment strategies for business education.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Career and technical education, formerly known as vocational education, “is an organized education program that offers a sequence of courses, providing individuals with the academic knowledge and skills needed to prepare for future education and careers in current or emerging occupations” (National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, 2003). There are over 15,000 secondary schools and 9,400 post secondary institutions in the U.S. spending \$13 billion dollars a year to serve 11 million students. In 1994, 97.2% of all high school graduates had taken at least one career and technical course (National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, 2003). Career and technical education helps students fulfill their working potential by teaching academic subject matter within a context of real world applications. In addition, employability skills are taught and education and career pathways explored (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2003).

Many program areas make up career and technical education. Programs such as marketing, health care, agriculture, business, etc., are included in the umbrella of career and technical education. Business education has as its mission to teach students about business. “In the twenty-first century, the mission of business education – to teach for and about business – will continue as the fundamental basis of instruction in business. Business education prepares learners to make wise personal economic and career choices while developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to succeed in the workforce” (Jaderstrom, 1995, p. 17).

Increasingly, the skills necessary for the business environment, of which all students will one day participate, come from courses taught in business education. The changing economy necessitates that all students be equipped with some basic knowledge of business. “With an increasingly competitive economy and job market swelling in the U.S., and indeed the world, it is no longer good enough to graduate from high school with an A in calculus and zero knowledge in the workings of the business world” (Shure, 2001, p. 26). A national survey of State Superintendents of Public Instruction and State Directors of Employment and Training believe business education should be part of the curriculum for every high school student (Yopp and Brumley, 1996). More importantly, the business education curriculum provides something that is sorely missing in public education – relevance. “A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience and thus the meaning of our education” (Lynch, 2002, p. 47). No matter what high school students plan to do after they graduate, business education has relevance to their lives. All students will need the skills necessary

to manage their own financial affairs and make intelligent choices. They will need skills to not only obtain employment but to become responsible, smart consumers.

HISTORY OF THE FIRM

Renee Pay is the creator and director of “Company” (called THE FIRM in Hampton City Schools) at the Jordan Applied Technology Center with the Jordan School District in Sandy, Utah. After 14 years of teaching business education, Pay felt frustrated with her teaching methods and decided to create modules of learning for her students in her keyboarding class that required mastery before going on to the next module of learning. Soon after, she was hired to build a state-of-the-art electronic office program at a new technical center in her school district. She contacted local employers who advised her as to the kind of hardware and software to teach as well as the skills they needed in their employees. Employers said they needed employees competent in oral and written communication and wanted the school to teach work ethics, dependability, promptness, productivity, loyalty, and commitment. “My goal was to provide a powerful student learning management system which validates master career skills, develops a high-level work ethic, fosters personal growth, encourages teamwork, and empowers students through choice, accountability, and competency-based learning and certifies competence in career and life skills” (Pay, personal communication, February 19, 2003). The program is structured and run as a business where students are considered employees. The system, replicated in over 23 states, makes learning competency-based where students must achieve a level of 86% or better before proving competence, puts students in charge and responsible for their own learning, provides an opportunity for students to

learn to accept responsibility and take charge of their lives, and allows students to learn real world accountability (Pay, personal communication, February 19, 2003). In 1998 Hampton City Schools decided to adopt the “Company” system and named it THE FIRM. By 1999 THE FIRM was implemented in all four high schools. No research has been conducted to determine the factors that influence students to enroll in this program in any of the states that have so far adopted “Company”.

TRENDS IN ENROLLMENT

The U.S. Department of Education’s report on enrollment statistics reveals that in 1994, 97 percent of public high school graduates completed at least one career and technical course, but only 25 percent finished three or more courses in a single occupational program. From 1982 to 1994, high school students completed fewer vocational credits, and the percentage of vocational concentrators (those students completing three or more courses in a single occupation program) also declined. But while business topped the list of students’ favorite majors in 1996, between 1990 and 1996 the percentage of vocational students majoring in business declined from 31% to 29% (Career Tech 2000: Statistical Snapshot, 2000).

One of the problems with enrollment numbers, however, is the inconsistency of the reported numbers. Some states define secondary school as grades 9-12, while others report enrollment numbers for 7-12 or 11-12. Some states count students only if they take three or more technical classes while others count them each time they take a technical class. Grubb, a leading researcher at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE), says, “it’s very difficult to draw trends in enrollment

because states determine enrollment so very differently... until we establish one way to count enrollment everywhere, we won't know for sure where it's up and where it's down" (Husain, 1999, p. 14).

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ENROLLMENT

There are many factors that influence the decision as to whether or not students enroll in career and technical education. Some of the factors that negatively impact enrollment decisions include increased academic requirements, poor image of "vocational" education, and uninformed guidance counselors.

After the 1980's report, "A Nation at Risk", decimated the U.S. educational system, academic requirements were raised in an effort to combat criticism. In the late 1980's various state studies found that the overall 50 percent drop in career and technical education enrollment was related to an increase in students' enrollment in academic courses (Husain, 1999). While schools were busy promoting high academic standards and a preparatory track to college for all students, career and technical education was left to falter. "The fact is that, in most high schools, business courses are not required or strongly recommended for all students. Moreover, students may be discouraged from enrolling in business related courses due to time constraints and a corresponding lack of guidance for preparing for a variety of life roles besides that of only attending a university upon graduation" (Yopp and Brumley, 1996, p. 12).

"Vocational education" has been battling a negative public image problem for quite some time. In an attempt to combat the poor image, many school districts and state departments over the last 10 years have been changing the name from vocational

education to career and technical education. Many feel that this name better reflects the direction vocational education is heading. Unfortunately, it will take more than just a name change to shift public perception of vocational education away from the stereotypes of “shop class” and “home economics”. It will take time and a tremendous marketing effort to change the perceptions of parents, who are determined to send their kids to college. “Public, especially parental, opinion persistently regards vocational education as the path for noncollege-bound students, with a narrow focus and limited opportunities” (Kerka, 2000, np).

While school guidance counselors have a great deal of influence over the course selection of students, many are not advocates of career and technical education because they often are not informed as to the nature of available programs. It is this lack of understanding of what career and technical education is that keeps the negative stereotypes of “vocational education” alive. In the *Major Needs of Career and Technical Education in the Year 2000* project of the National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education, the image of career and technical education among students, teachers, counselors, and administrators was a recurring concern. Too often counselors and administrators see career and technical education as a dumping ground for problem or low-achieving students. Employers even voiced their concern that attempts made at career days were undermined by counselors who discouraged interested students from enrolling in career and technical courses (Huss & Banks, 2001)

Just as there are factors that negatively impact the decision to enroll in career and technical education, there are also positive factors that influence the decision. Deciding factors for some students include the possibility of getting an early start on college

education by taking career and technical courses that also earn college credits, finding a match between their interests and a particular program, and seeing the programs for themselves with a visit (Jackson, 2002). A study of business and marketing programs in Georgia in 1998 found that “students expressed interest in taking more courses in these programs and stated that they especially enjoy computer-related courses, developing work-related skills, learning specific job tasks, working in groups, and developing human relations skills” (Womble, Adams, & Stitt-Gohdes, 2000, p. 42).

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

Educators and business leaders all agree that strong enrollment is vital to ensure business education programs success and effectiveness. “There is a great need to improve instructional programs, recruitment techniques, and promotional procedures used to ensure increased enrollments and retention in business and marketing courses and programs” (Womble, Adams, & Stitt-Gohdes, 2000, p. 44). The question remains how to achieve these goals. Participants, including students, teachers, and business leaders, in the 1998 Georgia study shared many ideas about how to effectively market and promote business programs. They believed business and marketing educators should become more involved in recruiting students for their programs, teachers should strive to change the sometimes negatively perceived image associated with these programs by clearly defining program identity, making all constituents aware of curriculum options, and promoting the long-term benefits of a solid base of academic courses enhanced by business courses. They also suggested gaining the support of guidance counselors in an effort to increase enrollment (Womble, Adams, & Stitt-Gohdes, 2000).

SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature available on the current state of career and technical education and examined enrollment data to determine that the numbers are inconsistent at best. History of THE FIRM was reviewed as well as the determination that no available research has been conducted to determine the factors that influence students to enroll in the program. However, factors that influence enrollment in career and technical education and specifically business education were reviewed and it was determined that currently there are more negative influences than positive. Suggestions for program promotion and recruitment strategies were reviewed with specific methods suggested to improve the negative image of “vocational education”.

Chapter III will describe the methods and procedures that were used to collect data to determine the factors that influenced students in the Business Department at Bethel High School to enroll in the program titled THE FIRM.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Chapter III describes the methods and procedures used to conduct this research study. This chapter will include a description of the population chosen for this study, the instrument design, methods used for collecting the data, and the statistical analysis method used to analyze the data.

POPULATION

The population of this study consisted of students enrolled in a program titled THE FIRM at Bethel High School, Hampton, Virginia, during school years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. The students surveyed ranged from tenth grade to twelfth grade. The total number of classes evaluated in the survey was ten and consisted of three courses titled Administrative Management FIRM, Computer Information Systems FIRM, and Word Processing FIRM II. The number of students per class for the survey ranged from six to eighteen high school students with a total population of 103.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The instrument used for data collection was a survey. The survey was designed to determine the factors that influenced students in the Business Department at Bethel High School to enroll in the program titled THE FIRM. Students were asked to respond to both open and closed form questions pertaining to courses taken, reasons for enrolling in THE FIRM, person(s) influencing their decision to enroll, and reasons they would and

would not recommend the program to other students. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix A.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The survey was administered between June 2 and June 5, 2003. A brief cover letter explaining the purpose and importance of the study, along with the survey, was distributed to every Bethel High School student enrolled in THE FIRM program during school years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. The survey was explained to students as it was being distributed, and students had as much time as they needed to complete the survey in its entirety. Students were asked to place their completed surveys in a sealed envelope before they were collected. A copy of the cover letter is located in Appendix B.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

After the completed surveys were collected, a statistical analysis was conducted in order to provide meaning to the collected data. The number and frequency of responses were calculated for each question and reported as raw scores and percentages.

SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the methods and procedures used to conduct this research study. The population targeted for this study along with the instrument designed to collect data were described. The manner in which the data were to be collected along with the methods used for statistical analysis were explained. The analysis of the data will be presented in detail in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influenced students in the Business Department at Bethel High School to enroll in the program titled THE FIRM. This chapter reports the findings of the survey administered during this research study. The student survey included a total of five questions. The first question asked which FIRM courses the student has taken. The second and third questions focused on how the student had heard about THE FIRM program and the reasons for choosing to enroll. The fourth and fifth questions focused on the factors that would most and least influence the decision to enroll again or to recommend the program to a friend. A total of 61 student surveys were completed out of 103. This equals a 59 percent return rate.

COURSES TAKEN IN THE FIRM

Question 1 of the research survey asked students, “Which FIRM courses have you taken? Check all that apply”. Of the 61 students surveyed, 44 reported having taken Computer Information Systems (CIS), 20 reported having taken Administrative Management, and 2 reported having taken Word Processing FIRM II. Table I indicates the number of students who have enrolled in the various FIRM courses.

FIRM COURSES TAKEN BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

<u>Courses Taken</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Computer Information Systems	44	72%
Administrative Management	20	33%
Word Processing FIRM II	2	3%

TABLE I

HOW STUDENTS HEARD ABOUT THE FIRM PROGRAM

Question 2 of the research survey asked students, “How did you hear about THE FIRM program? Check all that apply.” The top three responses indicate that business teachers, friends enrolled in THE FIRM and a guided tour most informed students about THE FIRM program. Table II indicates the survey choices available for the student to select, the number of students selecting each response, and the corresponding percentage rate.

HOW STUDENTS HEARD ABOUT THE FIRM

<u>Source</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Business teacher	32	53%
Friend enrolled in the program	27	44%
Guided tour	21	34%
Guidance counselor	19	31%
Teacher (other than business)	9	15%
Friend not enrolled in the program	7	12%
Parent/Guardian	1	2%

TABLE II

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED STUDENTS TO ENROLL IN THE FIRM

Question 3 of the research survey asked students, “What are the reasons you chose to enroll in a FIRM course? Check all that apply.” The top three responses indicate that interest in pursuing a business related career, interest in computers, and wanting to develop professionally are the most influential factors determining students’ choosing to enroll in THE FIRM. Table III indicates the survey choices available for the student to select, the number of students selecting each response, and the corresponding percentage rate.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED STUDENTS TO ENROLL IN THE FIRM

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Interested in computers	35	57%
Interested in pursuing a business related career	34	56%
Wanted to develop professionally	30	49%
Liked the layout of the facility	25	41%
Wanted to “work” in a simulated business environment	24	39%
Auctions and social activities	22	36%
Interested in office management	21	34%
Thought it would be an easy class	20	33%
Wanted to work independently	17	28%
The teacher teaching the course	10	16%
A friend was enrolled	10	16%
Thought it would be a challenging class	9	15%
Scheduled by guidance counselor	3	5%

TABLE III

FACTORS MOST INFLUENCING RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIRM

Question 4 of the research survey asked students, “Now that you have experienced THE FIRM program, what are the factors that would **most** influence you to enroll again or to recommend the program to a friend? Check all that apply.” The top four responses indicate that interest in pursuing a business related career, interest in computers, wanting to develop professionally, and auctions and social activities are the factors that would most influence students to enroll again or to recommend the program to a friend. The one response to the “other” category was the student liked working together with other students. Table IV indicates the survey choices available for the student to select, the number of students selecting each response, and the corresponding percentage rate.

**FACTORS THAT WOULD MOST INFLUENCE STUDENTS TO ENROLL AGAIN OR
RECOMMEND THE PROGRAM TO A FRIEND**

Factor	Number	Percentage
Interested in computers	36	59%
Auctions and social activities	34	56%
Interested in pursuing a business related career	30	49%
Want to develop professionally	30	49%
Interested in office management	29	48%
Like the layout of the facility	29	48%
Want to “work” in a simulated business environment	26	43%
Want to work independently	21	34%
The teacher teaching the course	20	33%
Thought it was an easy class	14	23%
Like dressing professionally	14	23%
Thought it was a challenging class	13	21%
Other	1	2%

TABLE IV

FACTORS LEAST INFLUENCING RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIRM

Question 5 of the research survey asked students, “Now that you have experienced THE FIRM program, what are the factors that would **least** influence you to enroll again or to recommend the program to a friend? Check all that apply.” The top two responses indicate that students dislike dressing professionally once a week, and they feel too much work is assigned. Responses to the “other” category include having no deadlines, and working with students who can’t handle the classroom environment. Fourteen students responding to the survey either did not check any boxes or wrote in the “other” category comments such as “liked the class”, “n/a” or “had no complaints”. Table V indicates the survey choices available for the student to select, the number of students selecting each response, and the corresponding percentage rate.

**FACTORS THAT WOULD LEAST INFLUENCE STUDENTS TO ENROLL AGAIN OR
RECOMMEND THE PROGRAM TO A FRIEND**

Factor	Number	Percentage
Did not like dressing professionally once a week	27	44%
Too much work	13	21%
Did not like the assigned work	6	10%
Did not like working independently	4	7%
Other	4	7%
Did not like learning about office work	3	5%
Did not like the teacher	1	2%
Did not like learning about computers	1	2%
Not enough work	1	2%
Did not like the layout of the facility	1	2%
Did not like “working” in a simulated business environment	1	2%

SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the findings of the student survey administered for this research study. The analysis of the data indicated THE FIRM courses students have taken, how they heard about THE FIRM program, the factors most influencing them to enroll in the program, and the factors that would most and least influence them to enroll again or recommend the program to a friend.

Chapter V of this study will summarize, draw conclusions, and propose recommendations based on the findings of this research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will include a summary of the research study, conclusions that can be drawn from the data collected to answer the research goals of this study, and recommendations based upon the results of the study.

SUMMARY

With nearly half of all employers believing that high school graduates are poorly prepared by high schools to handle the responsibility of the workplace, Hampton City Schools offers all high school students the opportunity to enroll in a program called THE FIRM. THE FIRM is an elective course that helps develop the work ethic of young people by promoting independence, responsibility, teamwork, and professional development. It is a competency-based program taught in a professional, simulated business environment for students desiring workplace experience and general office or computer skills. Students are expected to take responsibility for their learning and prioritize their work each day. Upon completion of the program, students are expected to have the necessary skills, confidence, and attitude to enter the world of work.

If business educators can understand why students chose as an elective to enroll in THE FIRM, the program's attractiveness to students can be enhanced and appropriate recruitment strategies developed. It was the purpose of this research study to determine the factors that influenced students to enroll in THE FIRM. Prior to this study, no research had been conducted to determine the reasons students were enrolling in THE FIRM courses. The goals of this study were to determine the reasons students enrolled in

THE FIRM, determine who influences students' decisions to enroll in THE FIRM, and recommend future recruitment strategies for THE FIRM.

The limitations of this study included using a survey to collect data from approximately 100 Bethel High School students covering a two-year period from school year 2001-2002 to 2002-2003. In conducting this research, the researcher believed that students are either currently enrolled in THE FIRM, or completed a year of THE FIRM last year and are still currently enrolled at Bethel High School. The researcher also believed that students completing the survey would represent all three courses taught in THE FIRM.

The data for this study were collected from Bethel High School students currently enrolled in THE FIRM and from current 12th graders who completed THE FIRM during the 2001-2002 academic school year. A survey was developed to determine the factors that influenced Bethel High School students to enroll in THE FIRM. The survey was explained to students as it was being distributed, and students had as much time as they needed to complete the survey in its entirety. Students were asked to place their completed surveys in a sealed envelope before they were collected. After the surveys had been completed and returned, the results were tabulated. A total of 61 student surveys were completed out of 103 or a total of 59%.

CONCLUSIONS

The answers to the following research goals are based on the findings of this research study:

Goal 1. Determine the reasons students enrolled in THE FIRM.

Of the 61 students responding to the survey, 57% were influenced to enroll in THE FIRM program because they were interested in computers, 56% were interested in pursuing a business related career, 49% wanted to develop professionally, 41% liked the layout of the facility, 39% wanted to “work” in a simulated business environment, 36% liked the auctions and social activities, 34% were interested in office management, 33% thought it would be an easy class, 28% wanted to work independently, 16% liked the teacher teaching the course, 16% because a friend was enrolled, 15% thought it would be a challenging class, and 5% were scheduled by their guidance counselor. It can be concluded that the primary reasons students choose to enroll in THE FIRM is their interest in pursuing a business related career, acquiring computer skills, and developing professionally.

Goal 2. Determine who influences students’ decisions to enroll in THE FIRM.

Students indicated they learned about THE FIRM program from the following: 53% from a business teacher, 44% from a friend enrolled in the program, 34% from a guided tour, 31% from a guidance counselor, 15% from a teacher (other than business), 12% from a friend not enrolled in the program, and 2% from a parent/guardian. This data suggests business teachers must continue informing students of THE FIRM program and influencing their decision to enroll in THE FIRM.

Goal 3. Recommend future recruitment strategies for THE FIRM.

Of the factors that would most influence students to enroll again or to recommend THE FIRM program to a friend, 59% of students indicated their interest in computers, 56% indicated their interest in the auctions and social activities of THE FIRM, 49% indicated their interest in pursuing a business related career, and 49% indicated their desire to

develop professionally. Of the factors that would least influence students to enroll again or to recommend THE FIRM program to a friend, 44% indicated their dislike of dressing professionally once a week, and 21% indicated they thought there was too much work in THE FIRM. This data, along with how the students heard about THE FIRM and the reasons why they chose to enroll, would suggest a continued effort to promote THE FIRM through business teachers, guidance counselors, the guided tour, and students enrolled in the program. Promotion of THE FIRM program to students interested in business related careers, computer skills, and professional development is strongly indicated by the data collected during this research. The data also indicate having THE FIRM teachers evaluate the amount of work being assigned in the program and the weekly requirement of professional dress for FIRM students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Continue educating and encouraging business teachers and guidance counselors to promote THE FIRM program to their students.
2. Design a brochure aimed at recruiting students into THE FIRM and place it in the guidance office and in each guidance counselor's office.
3. Continue offering guided tours to rising sophomores, juniors, and seniors.
4. Develop an incentive program to encourage currently enrolled FIRM students to actively recruit their friends into THE FIRM program.

5. Develop a recruitment strategy that includes promoting THE FIRM's development of computer skills, professional development, and auctions and social activities.
6. Develop a recruitment strategy aimed at students interested in pursuing a business related career.
7. Evaluate the amount of work assigned to FIRM students and the weekly requirement of professional dress.

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Appendix A

Survey

Survey of FIRM Students

The purpose of this survey is to determine the factors that are influencing students to enroll in THE FIRM program at Bethel High School.

Directions: Read each question carefully and mark with a pen or pencil the boxes next to the answers that apply. You may check as many boxes as necessary to answer the question. Use the “other” box to fill in any answers that do not appear as a choice.

- Which FIRM courses have you taken?
Check all that apply.
 - Computer Information Systems
 - Administrative Management
 - Word Processing FIRM II
- How did you hear about THE FIRM program? Check all that apply.
 - Business teacher
 - Teacher (other than business)
 - Guidance Counselor
 - Parent/Guardian
 - Friend enrolled in the program
 - Friend not enrolled in the program
 - Took a guided tour
 - Other _____
- What are the reasons you chose to enroll in a FIRM course? Check all that apply.
 - Interested in pursuing a business related career
 - Interested in computers
 - Interested in office management
 - The teacher teaching the course
 - Thought it would be an easy class
 - Thought it would be a challenging class
 - Wanted to develop professionally
 - Auctions and social activities
 - Liked the layout of the facility
 - Wanted to work independently
 - Wanted to “work” in a simulated business environment
 - Scheduled by guidance counselor
 - A friend was enrolled
 - Other _____
- Now that you have experienced THE FIRM program, what are the factors that would **most** influence you to enroll again or to recommend the program to a friend? Check all that apply.
 - Interested in pursuing a business related career
 - Interested in computers
 - Interested in office management
 - The teacher teaching the course
 - Thought it was an easy class
 - Thought it was a challenging class
 - Want to develop professionally
 - Auctions and social activities
 - Like the layout of the facility
 - Want to work independently
 - Want to “work” in a simulated business environment
 - Like dressing professionally
 - Other _____
- Now that you have experienced THE FIRM program, what are the factors that would **least** influence you to enroll again or to recommend the program to a friend? Check all that apply.
 - Did not like the assigned work
 - Did not like working independently
 - Did not like the teacher
 - Did not like learning about computers
 - Did not like learning about office work
 - Too much work
 - Not enough work
 - Did not like dressing professionally once a week
 - Did not like the layout of the facility
 - Did not like “working” in a simulated business environment
 - Other _____

Appendix B
Cover Letter

Dear Student:

The Bethel High School Business Department is conducting a study with current FIRM students. The purpose is to determine those factors that are influencing students to enroll in the FIRM program. The reasons why students are enrolling in THE FIRM program and who most influences the decision is very important to us.

Your participation in this study is vital to the success of our business education program. Thank you for your time and effort in completing this survey.

Sincerely,

Susan Carroll
Business Teacher
Bethel High School