



START A COLLEGE OUTREACH PROGRAM

Where are the highly-trained real estate specialists and how can we recruit them?

BY JAMES P. ANTHONY, SR/WA, R/W-NAC

Recruiting young professionals has long been a goal – and a challenge – for IRWA. However, an untapped resource may be right around the corner.

San Diego Chapter 11 is located in proximity to three major universities, two of which have significant real estate programs. The city also hosts an extensive community college system that provides basic real estate licensing curriculum.

It occurred to our chapter that we may be coming up short in terms of recruiting the graduates produced by these local institutions. This initially became apparent in the workplace, when we first noticed how few qualified individuals were applying for job openings. We also felt that something was missing in our chapter membership, when the new members were sworn in at our monthly luncheons and gave a synopsis of their backgrounds. Where were all the highly trained real estate specialists graduating from these schools? Why are they under-represented among our ranks?

It crossed our minds that these graduates may not even know we exist. Upon further investigation, we found that this was, in fact, the case. We were informed that neither the students nor their instructors had ever heard of IRWA and only had a very basic idea of what the right of way field was about. We knew we had to get the word out to these prospective members and their college instructors and administrators to bring them into the fold.

With this in mind, our chapter created a 10-step strategic plan which has led to our success. I hope you will use them to boost your chapter recruitment efforts as well.

1) Examine your Resources

Local schools: Crucial to determining the feasibility of a college outreach program is having a local college or university that offers course work in real estate or appraisal. You may also consider civil engineering, surveying, environmental science, law or any other major that could ultimately lead to right of way work. Make a list of those you think might be appropriate.

Marketing tools: Our chapter has an exceptional newsletter and website. Both reflect the professional quality and content we wish to convey and would be proud to send out to those who may have an interest in our unique niche of the real estate industry. Besides providing intra-chapter communications, these vehicles are our best advertising resources next to actual face-to-face contact.

Human resources: We are lucky to have alumni from each of these schools in our membership, as well as others who are members of affiliated organizations that have already made some outreach inroads into these academic institutions and can provide first hand advice on how to work with them.

Educational resources: Chapter 11 has an exemplary education program featuring course work not generally available at the local schools. We are always seeking out new participants. This is the major source of funding for most chapters.

2) Identify the Appropriate Contacts

From the list of qualifying local schools, go online and make note of the appropriate department or program heads and their email addresses. Check for student organizations and their leaders. Include these key contacts on your chapter's mailing lists for newsletters and special events. This will immediately start getting your name out there. Your program will already be at work while you complete the next steps.

3) Identify the Wants and Needs of Each Party

This step is for planning purposes and to prepare for later negotiations. In actual discussions, you will probably find that what the school administration and student organizations are looking for are scholarship, internship and future employment opportunities for their students. Our chapter, on the other hand, would like to increase membership, generate participants for our active education program and develop future chapter leadership by attracting the highly-trained graduates from these local institutions. As discussions and negotiations proceed, more detailed wants/needs of each party will likely arise.

4) Develop a Sponsorship Package for Students

This should include a free student membership, a complimentary class to get students started on one of IRWA's career path programs, and discounts to local chapter events like luncheons and classes. More importantly, include scholarship opportunities in the package. This is a major prize for them. The student memberships only cost us \$50 each after our rebate from IRWA. The free classes are for chapter-sponsored courses only, thus costing us only the IRWA share of the tuition. They are limited to one or two-day courses and the discounts are usually subsidized by our general fund. The potential payback to the chapter in future revenues for membership dues and classes over the lifetime of the recipients' careers could be exponential.

5) Start a Chapter Scholarship

Our chapter created a scholarship a few years back, but we have been lacking in applications. So what steps did we take? We used California logic and threw money at it. We raised the scholarship from \$1,000 to \$2,000 in hopes of creating a considerably more attractive incentive. The student memberships included as part of the package are necessary to qualify the selected individuals for applying for both the Chapter 11 and IRWA SARPA scholarships. While not offered exclusively to any particular group, the awards are significant enough to satisfy the sponsored organization.

6) Initiate Marketing Efforts

From the list of appropriate contacts established in the second step, we initially included these individuals on our newsletter mailing list. One of our first contacts was the sponsorship chair of San Diego State's Real Estate Society (RES), who is now the current president. He actually contacted us to convince us that we should become sponsors of the RES.

With the University of San Diego, the initial response came from the Executive Director of The Burnham-Moores Center for Real Estate, the department head, who called to tell us he thought he was put on our mailing list in error. Once I explained to him what we had to offer, he was thrilled and assigned the head of their masters program as our contact. At the initial meeting with university staff, the faculty advisor for their Real Estate Society was also in attendance. So in one case, we broke through via the student organization and the other via faculty and staff. Both produced about the same result.

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7) Establish a Relationship

After receiving a response from a new contact, begin an email dialogue with them to break the ice. Then schedule a face-to-face meeting. Some topics to include should be:

- Find out what they want might want to achieve. You will find that schools need us as much as we need them. They are always looking for sources for scholarships, jobs and internship opportunities. Developing a relationship with us is a big win for them.
- Educate them on the right of way field and what it has to offer to the school and/or their students. Remember, they probably have very little background on what we do.
- Inform them of what your chapter can do for them, such as specific training in preparation for entering the right of way field. Let them know about the different scholarship, internship and job opportunities available as an IRWA member.

- Communicate what you want in return. In our case, it was to generate new chapter members and a future employment pool to staff our respective organizations. We now view these efforts as building the future of our industry. Our chapter has a highly developed education program. We know that new blood equates to new clientele for our classes and thus money in our coffers. We are talking a win-win relationship here.

8) Nail Down a Sponsorship Agreement

From your discussions and anticipated objectives, negotiate a mutually-beneficial sponsorship package. Let them know what you can offer and what you expect in turn, such as mutual inclusion on mailing lists and event invitations, speaking or presentation opportunities to their group, or visa versa, and advertising on their website and/or banners at their events. Essentially, this is what Chapter 11 is currently receiving.

9) Designate a Liaison

Identify a chapter member who is an alumnus or has a special interest in working with each school, and see if they would be willing to take on the responsibility. If so, with the approval of your executive board, appoint them as the official liaison. The College Outreach Program could become a new standalone chapter committee, or it could fall under the auspices of another committee, such as Membership, Public Relations, Professional Development or Local Public Agency. In our chapter, it is under Professional Development, primarily because I am the Chair and developed the program. With a strong independent liaison, it may not be too demanding on the committee chairs. Many of our committees consist of only one person.

10) Set up Ongoing Program Administration

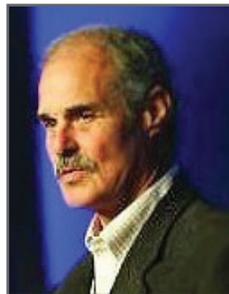
Add their contacts to your chapter mailing lists, including newsletters, education e-blasts and special events notices. Notify the school or student organization of your chapter's contacts, such as the executive committee and designated liaison. Advise them of the procedures for submitting sponsored scholarship and membership applications. Follow up to make sure your chapter contacts are on their mailing lists and plugged into their communications network. Like any agreement, basic contract administration should be applied. Make sure they are keeping up with their side of the bargain.



Results Speak Volumes

In less than a year, Chapter 11's College Outreach Program now includes sponsorship agreements with the two major university-level real estate programs in San Diego. For our generosity, we have been rewarded with invitations to attend their respective real estate-related events. We are featured on promotional banners at their events and on their websites, and will be speaking or presenting to their groups at various meetings throughout the year. With the free class vouchers we included in our sponsorship packages, we are anticipating some newcomers to start their IRWA career path program, further enhancing our chapter's education program. Hopefully, it will attract other students as word gets around.

We also received three highly qualified applicants for our annual chapter scholarship and for the SARPA Award, and are expecting more in the near future. These same scholarship applicants are also new student members of Chapter 11, and quite possibly our future leaders. We expect the win-win relationship to continue to grow for years to come and become a major permanent part of our recruiting and public relations efforts.



James P. Anthony, SR/WA, RW-NAC

Jim is currently a Principal with Southwest Realty Network, having recently retired from the City of San Diego's Real Estate Assets Department. He is a recent past President of Chapter 11 and has served on the executive board since 2002. He is also a two-time chapter Professional of the Year honoree and the current Professional Development Chair.