

Recruitment and Retention in the ATE Program

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Executive Summary

One goal of the ATE program is to increase the number of skilled technicians in this country. Successful achievement of this goal will require effective recruitment and retention (R & R) of students. In this paper, we examine these R & R efforts.

Four data sources were examined for information on this issue: NSF-based publications, literature on the topics of recruitment and retention, responses from two surveys of project directors, and reports of site visits.

We describe findings from current literature that helped our understanding of the general background issues surrounding recruitment and retention as well as the various strategies employed to enhance both efforts. We present a model for R & R practice that contains three elements: Information, Preparation, and Support. Those elements and methods to serve them are elaborated through a series of tables. We supplemented the tabular information with five case examples. These cases show recruitment and retention from different vantage points.

Several conclusions were reached as a result of our analysis:

NSF's guidelines for funded *projects* (i.e., ATE projects and centers) encourage the development of programs that recruit and retain groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in technology positions. Stronger and more specific language regarding accountability of R & R has been added to the guidelines in recent years.

ATE efforts address all three parts of the recruitment and retention model we presented. Their efforts provide for developing interest in technical education; proper preparation of students, teachers, and staff; and support for persons engaged in the educational program.

Many activities are being used to recruit and retain students in ATE programs. Especially noteworthy are the many collaborative arrangements between colleges and business/industry. These arrangements are key to the success of the ATE program, and, in some cases, are directly responsible for the recruitment and retention of large numbers of students. Testimonials of success and promised success can be found throughout the survey and site visit data. However, *projects* (i.e., projects and centers) have generally not reported actual recruitment and retention rates based on systematic evaluation[s] of their recruitment and retention efforts.

R & R is a major emphasis in all community colleges, and *project* reports often included descriptions of community college R & R efforts outside the bounds of their ATE grants. As a result, it was not always clear whether recruitment/retention activities were supported by the ATE grants or if any linkages existed between ATE *project* efforts and other community college and business/industry efforts.

Both the literature and *project* data suggest that the effectiveness of each R & R method may be enhanced by an array of factors. These factors include the timing of the approach, the degree to which personal and repeated contact is made with the prospective or enrolled student, and the level of expertise to which the student is exposed. In other words: how a message or service is delivered—when, how often, and by whom, will play significant roles.

We make two major recommendations. First, further strengthen, promote, and clarify recruitment and retention objectives in the ATE program guidelines. Describe recruitment and retention as a system rather than individual activities. Emphasize that it is integral to the ATE program to encourage matriculation in and successful completion of the college's technology program. State that the R & R system should provide traditional and nontraditional prospective and enrolled students with needed elements of Information, Preparation, and Support.

Second, make evaluation integral to R & R to document these efforts and accomplishments and/or to identify ways for improvement.

Information to support findings presented in this study are available from the lead author as four documents. One shows NSF-ATE guidelines for the fiscal years 1994-2002 in tabular format for all items specifically worded around the issues of recruitment and retention. The remaining three documents are tables that show how responses to survey questions and site visit report information were categorized using the three-part framework of Information, Preparation, and Support.

Table of Contents

OVERVIEW.....	1
THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CONTEXT	2
General Background	2
Recruitment	2
Retention	3
Key Factors for Recruitment and Retention	4
THE ATE PROGRAM.....	5
Locus of Activities.....	6
Key Participants	6
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS FROM SURVEY AND SITE VISIT DATA.....	7
Information	7
Preparation	7
Support	8
ATE Survey and Site Visit Findings.....	8
Case Examples	13
DISCUSSION.....	21
CONCLUSIONS.....	23
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	24
REFERENCES.....	25