

CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE RETENTION PROGRAMS

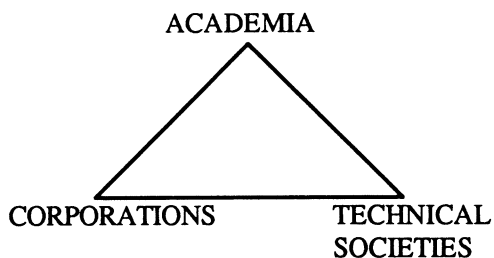
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Corporate involvement in college retention programs is critical to the growth of the U.S. engineering profession. It is important that all professional sectors: corporate, academic, and the technical/professional societies address the issues in a coordinated, complimentary effort.

Let's first address the nature of this partnership. After that we will examine the various perspectives and advantages of the partnership from a corporate, academic, and technical society viewpoint. Following that we will examine what activities can be accomplished within the partnership, and then a discussion of how we can effectively implement the partnership.

The partnership can be depicted as shown below:



Each point is critical to its success. If one of these partners is missing, the retention program will not be as effective as it could be. All parties have something unique to offer the process, and all parties have something to gain from a successful program. Early agreement and buy-in to mutual goals is critical--and the overall

objective is: Retention of Women and Minorities in the Engineering Profession.

Let's first look at the corporate perspective. The advantages to a corporation are many. The corporation is exposed to future employees, and can observe them and their skills before a major commitment is made. There also is a large benefit to cost ratio. A relatively small amount of funding is required, and the tangible and intangible benefits are many. Involvement in college retention programs also aids current employee morale. When women and minority professionals are able to talk about their chosen profession, they find themselves feeling better about their career choice. This subsequently aids retention of these employees, whose turnover rate is higher industry-wide than the turnover rate for white males.

Retention programs build pipelines of interested students and academics. Over the years, these people will talk favorably about the corporation, and that will also help people to consider engineering careers.

Participating in these programs infuses energy and talent into the corporate workforce. It's exciting and a break from the routine. Participating in these programs helps to develop managerial skills in the corporate employees that participate in the organization of the events, the relationship buildings, and the public speaking that is required when interfacing with large groups of students.

Let's look at the partnership advantages to academia:

- Available funding for programs
- Role model contacts for students and faculty
- Source of programming - trips, talks
- Increased enrollment due to success of the retention program

The advantages to technical societies are less obvious, but they also benefit from corporate assistance to the student and local chapters.

- Provides a "bridge" between student membership roles and the professional membership roles

- Personal growth of each member
- Membership retention
- Membership programs

Some Activities to Build the Partnership:

- Career fairs
- Guest speakers
- Field trips
- Socials/Dinners
- Campus-wide events
- One-on-one coaching
- Scholastic support
- Project sponsorship

The Path Forward

In order to insure a successful path forward, it is important to review your institution's corporate sponsorship levels in your college retention programs. Focus your efforts toward strengthening the partnership between your school, the corporations, and the technical societies, so that your relationships lead to rewarding, long-term commitments. Survey local and regional, corporate and technical society support that is available to you. Work on developing the relationships necessary to sustain the program during personnel changes and depressed business cycles. In addition, form an advisory board, that meets a few times a year to look at ways to support the retention program. In summary, the resources are available, and a partnership among corporations, academia, and technical societies will ensure a successful women and minorities in engineering retention program. Set your goals and have at it!

