First Year Scholarships: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two years the Eastern Institute of Technology(EIT) has introduced a scholarship programme in which students receive the first year's tuition fees free and pay half fees for year 2. In 2005, 33% of the Bachelor of Computing Systems (BCS) intake was scholarship students. This paper has a summary of interviews with the scholarship students, which investigate the reasons why they have chosen to study at EIT. Is it solely the scholarship that has attracted them or are there some other contributing reasons?

Surveys and in-depth interviews were carried out on the sample group of the scholarship students to ascertain the reasons for choosing EIT as their preferred tertiary provider.

Analysis was undertaken as to why students chose EIT and were categorised into the following areas:
·   EIT reputation as a tertiary provider
·   The advice given by Schools and other key influences
·   Personal considerations
·   The Scholarships financial benefits

This paper will draw conclusions around how successful the scholarship programme is as a marketing tool to Year 13 students in schools, and the effect that the scholarship has had on first year student numbers for the BCS.

1 INTRODUCTION

Attracting and retaining secondary school leavers to the Polytechnic sector in New Zealand has always been problematic. Institutions have tried many different initiatives to try and increase numbers in this area and some have even gone further and provided incentives to all prospective students (for example: Southland Institute of Technology).

This paper outlines the establishment of the scholarship programme for year 13 students wishing to study at EIT, and the benefits gained from having such a programme from a student and institutional perspective. A survey was carried out with 1st year BCS students to obtain information about decisions made around choosing EIT and the scholarship programme, including key influences and perceived benefits.

The paper commences by looking at the background to the creation of the scholarships, followed by analysis of the questions asked in the questionnaire and conclusions drawn. Following this directions for further research around this area will be outlined.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

Like many other institutions in the polytechnic sector, EIT is faced with the same problem every year; How to convince school leavers to study at the institute. Historically the numbers leaving school and studying at EIT have been very static over the years, ranging from 28 in 2001 to 32 in 2003.

These numbers were the driving force behind Senior Management's desire to increase these numbers and put a stop on the number of students heading out of the region to study at other tertiary institutions. During 2002 and the early part of 2003 numerous options and alternatives were presented to try and lift the number of school leavers enrolling at EIT.

During 2003 a decision was made to go ahead with a scholarship programme beginning in 2004 for school leavers, with the following objectives in mind:

·   Reduce the flow of school leavers leaving the region for tertiary institutions in other areas

·   Compete with other tertiary institutions

which are already offering scholarships to students in the region

· Attract school leavers to study at EIT who are staying in Hawkes Bay, but had no intention to study at all

· Attract enrolments from school leavers who might otherwise have studied somewhere else

Numerous options were explored as to the makeup of a potential scholarship programme and how it would work. Following consultation within EIT Senior Management and stakeholders it was decided that the following model be adopted.

A scholarship will be available to every Hawkes Bay Year 13 Secondary School graduate studying for a degree at EIT. Year 1 study will attract a 100% free tuition fee with year two attracting a 50% free fee subject to meeting the required standards.

An acceptance criterion was also defined and applicants had to meet the following:

1. Undertake full-time degree study at EIT

2. Be a year 13 graduate from a secondary school in the Hawkes Bay region from Dannevirke to Wairoa and Taupo

3. Meet the EIT year 13 degree entry requirements

EIT also defined the overall objective of the Scholarship programme as being "to double the number of year 13 students who come to EIT to study a degree."

3 METHODOLOGY

The papers discussion and results section is limited in its findings because this is an initial pilot study based on one Degree Programme (BCS) at EIT.

In 2005, 36 students enrolled in the first year of the BCS programme. Of these 12 are scholarship students. Each of these students consented to fill out a questionnaire regarding:

· EIT reputation as a tertiary provider

· The advice given by Schools and other key influences

· Personal considerations

· The Scholarships financial benefits

4 DISCUSSION

Following the completion of the questionnaire, the following results

4.1 EIT's reputation as a tertiary provider

Although most respondents knew of EIT as a tertiary provider in Hawkes Bay, few of the them had an in-depth knowledge of the courses offered and the services provided. Those that had some awareness gained this from either personal contact with someone who had had an EIT experience or had direct personal contact by studying at EIT whilst still at secondary school.

It was noted by one respondent that the particular programme which they had selected had a good reputation within the polytechnic sector.

4.2 The advice given by Schools and other key influences.

Respondent's cited parents and friends as having the biggest influence on their decision to study at EIT in 2005. Schools, in particular guidance councillors, although not mentioned as being of influence, were a source of information for respondents about EIT and in particular the EIT scholarship programme. Furthermore, when asked how they would promote EIT most respondents included some reference to promoting EIT in the schools.

Respondents identified the following ways in which EIT could promote EIT and the scholarship in schools

"Have current students on the scholarship programme go back to their old school and promote it"

"Offer an introduction course day to computer students"

"Encourage computing teachers to speak to their students about taking the course"

"By showing\explaining that it is as good or equivalent to a University degree"

4.3 Personal considerations

The EIT Scholarship allows the student the luxury of staying at home and therefore not incurring the costs associated with going to another university such as travel and accommodation.

Interestingly enough, one influential student at a school found out about the scholarship programme and decided to study at EIT and the rest of his friends and some other students followed.

Some students indicated that the scholarship had taken the pressure off them academically and were not working to their full potential and indicated that they might have put more effort in had they been paying the fees themselves.

All but one respondent found that the academic level of the BCS was on par or above their expectations.

4.4   The Scholarship's financial benefits.

Overwhelmingly most respondents are studying at EIT because of the scholarship and its benefits. In fact, over 80% indicated they would not study at EIT, if there was no scholarship. Most respondents commented about being able to remain debt free and not having to take out a student loan in year 1 of their study.

The predicted amount of savings made varied from $3,500 to $10,000. It is assumed the lower figure represents only course fees and the larger figure includes the cost of free board at home etc.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There is strong evidence to suggest that the scholarship has been successful in convincing students to stay in Hawke's Bay and it would be disappointing not to see it continue. It gives students a financial incentive to remain in Hawkes Bay. Furthermore, this year it gave the BCS the critical mass.

EIT must continue attempting to increase its profile in secondary schools.

There needs to be an advertisement campaign targeting parents, informing them of the potential savings and benefits of the scholarship programme.

Students need to be fully aware of the academic requirements to carry the scholarship programme over into year 2.

Incentives need to be introduced to encourage to achieved ti their highest potential. For example, students scholarship funding could be reviewed depending on academic outcomes per semester.

Further areas of Research:

Having completed the initial pilot study of BCS students and the scholarship programme a number of potential areas of further research have come to light and these include the following:

· How would these results and conclusions compare to other areas of the institute?

· What are the benefits to the greater community for keeping these students in Hawke's Bay?

· Extend the survey to institutes with similar scholarships.

· Survey senior students in Hawke's Bay secondary schools to find what information they know about EIT.

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