ITLS Marketing Survey Results

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Executive Summary

Much of marketing is guesswork, but wherever possible, we try to replace the guesswork with actual data. Electronic surveys are one of the quickest ways marketers can gather data from a wide variety of individuals that will help them make data-driven decisions. This survey gathers data for the Instructional Technology & Learning Sciences (ITLS) department at Utah State University on areas essential to the success of marketing to future students.

The survey was administered by email to a sample group of 124 current ITLS students (first year, second year, doctorate, and students on leave of absence) plus an additional 38 alumni of the ITLS program. The email contained a link to a 12 question survey hosted on the Qualtrics web-based survey tool. The survey was open for approximately one week for each group. Sixty-five (65) total survey responses (38.2% response rate) were collected for analysis. This document contains the survey results and recommendations.

Initial analysis of the survey demographics show that the majority of respondents took part in the master's program (82%), with a surprisingly close split of online to face-to-face (F2F) students (52% to 40%). Two thirds of respondents were transfer students from another institution, and three quarters of the respondents were from inside the State of Utah. Twenty-six percent described their professional status as full-time higher education, followed by 16% in full-time student and full-time k-12 instructor. Full time industry came in at 15% of respondents. Respondents reported learning about the ITLS program through the USU website (48%) and through word of mouth (44%); online searches tallied in at 28% making the ITLS website and word of mouth the two most important marketing methods to leverage. Analysis of results show that "interest in the subject matter" was the most common factor that influenced the decision to enroll, followed by "flexibility," and "relevance to current employment" at a close third; "academic reputation of the College of Education" and "academic reputation of the USU ITLS program" also scored high. Respondents most often cited positive interactions with faculty and work related issues as additional factors influencing their decision to enroll.

More than a third of the respondents expressed interest in providing a testimonial of their experiences with the ITLS program and many provided additional suggestions for the program which ranged from updates to the website to additions to the course offerings.

The survey analysis surfaced several key recommendations. Ten of these are included in the "Top Ten" section and should be the most impactful or easiest to implement ideas. Beyond these, the "Sweet 16" section details out sixteen more ideas that could be implemented that may offer some impact to enrollment. The "Don'ts" section describes seven actions that should be avoided as they may have negative impact on enrollment. Overall, the students were complimentary of the ITLS program and enjoyed the flexibility and relevance of their coursework. Key areas of improvement are in the website, adding coursework that is relevant to commercial job requirements, and expanding the online course offerings.

The following analysis provides some insight into the questions and responses including a stratification of results, a discussion of the written suggestions, and a list of possible action items based off of the survey results.

Methods & Procedures

While the ITLS survey does provide some valuable feedback, it should be noted that it does not exactly represent the target group for marketing efforts. Current and former students of the ITLS program should be considered a *convenience sample*. The term convenience sample is used to describe a sample that is taken from the most readily available source; this also means that the sample size may not be statistically appropriate to represent the full target audience. While a convenience sample is not entirely statistically relevant, it is used in situation where obtaining an appropriate sample is not possible, too expensive, or restricted by some other factor.

Surveying current and former students does give valuable insight into a group that that 1) at one time was looking for a master's or doctorate degree program, and 2) ended up being influenced by some set of factors to enroll in the ITLS program at USU. The actual target for the ITLS department marketing efforts are students that are currently or will be looking for a master's or doctorate degree program. As marketing efforts expand, it is recommended to funnel resources into identifying characteristics of this true target group through interviews, focus groups, and/or surveys.

The survey was administered to 124 current students, representing almost the entire list of students maintained by the USU ITLS staff in Spring 2014. Additionally, the survey was administered to 38 alumni that were obtained from the list maintained by the University's Alumni Relations department.

The survey invitation was a brief email that solicited help for a brief survey that would give the department insight into how students got into the program and what they would suggest to improve the program. The survey itself was administered on the Qualtrics program—the USU ITLS department has a subscription to this tool allowing full access to the platform capabilities. The survey was open to each group, current students and alumni, for one week after which the survey was still open, but not actively solicited. A few additional surveys trickled in after the week deadline. The goal was to receive 62 surveys (1/2 of the total number of current students). With the addition of the alumni responses, we received 65 total responses, some of which were partially completed surveys. All surveys, both complete and partial were included in the analysis.

The analysis of the survey results were compiled through the reporting capabilities of Qualtrics and imported into Microsoft Excel. The stratified analysis is included in this document.

03 REWARD CHAMPIONS

01 UPGRADE THE WEBSITE

04 RECRUIT FROM PRIVATE SCHOOLS

02 COMPLETE TESTIMONIALS

05 RELATIONSHIPS WITH CAMPUS DEPARTMENTS

07 FOCUS ON ONLINE PROGRAMS

09 ADDITIONAL TOOLS CLASSES

06 RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY BUSINESSES

08 RESEARCH COMPETING UTAH PROGRAMS

10 DEVELOP WRITTEN MARKETING GOALS

TOP 10 SUGGESTIONS

Sweet 16

1 Conduct a follow up survey to gather additional details from the next cohort.

2 Optimize the web content to favor "interest," "flexibility," and "relevance to employment" in that order.

3 Actively market to public and private school teachers. Key word is *actively*. Key message should be "flexibility."

4 Actively recruit from other departments on campus (e.g. RCDE, CIDI, adjunct professors, and other key groups).

5 Use Google Analytics to find our major traffic sources (i.e. "referrals") and improve those entry points.

6 Offer to do in-service training at local k-12 or private schools featuring the latest and greatest teaching tactics/research.

7 Optimize content for the two major differentiators "fully online program" and "commercial instructional design"

8 Call out all possible program options (e.g. online, face-to-face, weekend (?), hybrid; education, commercial)

9 Identify how we stack up to in-state and out-of-state programs with regard to tuition and online flexibility.

10 There is a lot of ambiguity surrounding the MLTID degree. We should adequately define that.

11 Encourage participation in the multimedia minor, possibly leading in to a bachelor's offering.

12 Many students asked about the possibility of an online PhD program. Is that even possible?

13 Start generating valuable content. Use professors, students, etc. to publish valuable content to help SEO and reputation.

14 Improve online content in the following areas: scholarships, student research, flexibility, what can be done with the degree.

15 Actively identify Google search terms that can be optimized on the website content: (e.g. online instructional design degrees).

16 Discover how the ITLS program is being portrayed on www.usu.edu, the RCDE website, etc. Correct errors/poor content.

Discussion of Recommendations

Top 10

1. **Upgrade the website:** We received several survey responses that identified the website as a key area for improvement. From the survey results, it was apparent that the two key ways that future students are finding out about the ITLS program are through word of mouth and through the ITLS website. In about half the cases, students that marked the ITLS website also marked the use of a search engine to find the program. This means that for about ½ of the students hitting the website, it is likely their first encounter with the ITLS program. For these reasons, I highly recommend a strong look at the ITLS website. This should be done with a clean slate, meaning that while everything up to this point has been valuable, it should be looked at as expendable.

   The website should look very professional and up to date. Great examples of these types of websites can be found on the main USU website (www.usu.edu) and the Huntsman School of Business (http://huntsman.usu.edu). Our current website lacks in the areas of design and usability. I feel strongly enough about this that I would recommend spending the entire marketing budget on it. This tool is valuable enough of a resource that every effort should be taken to ensure that students get a great first impression of the program and can find what they need.

2. **Collect the testimonials**: Students want to see video testimonials. It puts them at ease to see real students telling their story about how they got into the program, their experience in the program, what they got out of it, and where they are now because of it. Twenty-three students offered to provide a testimonial for the program, and there are likely more. I highly recommend that these testimonials be gathered in a very timely manner (before these students are scattered so far that they cannot be reached for video testimonials). Even if they are scattered, I'd recommend finding some of the best stories and sending out someone to capture their story on video.

   Testimonials can be captured in a few ways. First and most valuable is video. They are posted on YouTube and then embedded as website content. Testimonials can also be captured in writing or simply as an audio recording. Finally, testimonials can be captured on the web as a "Google Review." This requires someone to set up a Google account for the department as well as a Google+ page. The more content on the Google profile the better. Alumni can then go on and post a review. These reviews are extremely valuable to organic searchers and weigh in heavily on the most recent Google search algorithms. This is one of the best ways we can improve our "findability."

3. **Reward Champions:** Several of the respondents called out specific people with whom they had a key conversation that led to their enrollment. In some cases these were faculty, and in some cases they were alumni or current students of the program. Whenever possible, the department should seek to uncover the specific names of individuals that are actively referring to the program and openly reward them for their

assistance. The rewards should be substantial, enough to say "thank you" as well as "keep it up." A $10 Jamba Juice gift card, in my opinion, is not enough. Something like a $50 gift card to the restaurant of their choice is there or getting really close. It should be something that when they open it up they are surprised and very motivated to continue talking about the program. Word will soon get out that the department is rewarding those that refer students to the program, and it may develop into a full-fledged referral program. At the very least it is a great gesture of public/alumni relations.

4. **Recruit to private school industry:** One of the responses suggested recruiting from the private school industry. The reason I'm so excited about this one is that I feel like most of the programs in the state (specifically those at UofU and BYU who are the major competitors of the USU ITLS program) focus on public school teachers and slightly on the commercial industry. Private schools are likely a completely untapped source of potential students. Private schools usually have lower student/teacher rates, more funding, and greater freedom in the types of things they can do in the classroom. I also feel like they'd be more progressive in adopting technology and trying to up the education level of their instructors. It may be a complete flop, but I'd highly recommend running a full scale marketing campaign aimed at the private school industry.

5. **Develop relationships with key on campus departments:** Several of the students noted that they somehow heard about the ITLS program through their undergraduate program, professor, advisor, etc. ITLS is so versatile and is applicable for so many industries, I feel that many undergraduate students could benefit from an ITLS masters. These programs include: MIS, CS, JCOMM, Marketing, Graphic Design, Psychology, etc. This may be outside of the strategy—recruiting from USU undergraduate programs—but the first step would be to develop relationships with those departments that are already telling students about the ITLS program. This could be as simple as stopping in with some treats or as complex as holding joint events. The point is that developing personal relationships with the professors and advisors will increase the chance that they will think of you when they have a student to recommend to a program.

6. **Build relationships with key industry companies:** Some of the students mentioned that they learned about the program through recommendations from people within industry companies (i.e. Instructure). Developing the same types of relationships as mentioned in #5, but this time with industry partners, will help improve the chance that the word of mouth will get around the commercial sector. These relationships can be built by sending cards, personal visits, asking for project ideas, and inviting members from key companies to speak at events.

7. **Focus on the online program:** One of the key differentiators that surfaced from the survey was the USU online program. It is much more flexible than its counterpart at the UofU and I'm not entirely sure if the BYU program even has an online option (it seems like when I was researching BYU's program that they required their students to be fulltime students on campus for their first year). Whatever the case, as it stands right now, the USU ITLS online program beats the competition, but if the competing programs are listening to their customer base, we won't stay ahead for very long unless we continue improving our online presence.

Continuous improvement in the online program can be adding additional classes,

removing classes that are not valuable, adding more flexibility and adding/refining technology, and maintaining or increasing the quality standards of online courses. Whatever direction you choose, I highly recommend a strong push to solidify our stance as the best in the State (75% of our students come from in-state), and then develop a marketing campaign that goes to key target segments (e.g. active k-12 teachers) telling them about the flexibility of our online program.

8. **Research competing programs:** As mentioned, the two competing university level programs for ITLS in the State are UofU and BYU. We are well positioned against these two programs with our superior online program and the sense in the industry that we prepare our students much better for commercial instructional design than the other programs. However, we should do all that we can to take the guesswork out of these statements. This can be done by continued research amongst our students and through researching the competing programs. I recommend a thorough research project targeted at each of these programs that can adequately describe the pros and cons each program. This project should be refreshed probably on a yearly basis to capture new features added by the competitors.

   Additionally, we should look at other programs that have low tuition and good online programs. The University of Wyoming and Arizona State University were both brought up by students in the survey responses. These universities would be a great start.

9. **Add additional tools classes:** Several of the students responding to the survey shared that there is a disconnect between the types of tools classes the ITLS program prepares students with and the types of tools the industry is asking for in job descriptions. The software programs that were brought up several times were Captivate and Articulate. Also brought up were Camtasia (video editing software), InDesign (desktop publishing), and exposure to common learning management systems. A quick Google search for "Instructional Design Jobs" corroborated what the students were saying. Most of the descriptions asked for experience with Articulate specifically as well as a smattering of other software systems.

   I highly recommend that the ITLS program listen to both what the industry is asking for and what the students are asking for. The solution should be a full-fledged course, taught by a faculty member, and not just an independent study, Lynda.com course. One idea I had was to have a class, such as Design Studio, go through the instructional design process to create the Articulate class. This would expose students to the Articulate program for which they would need to become experts, give experience with the instructional design process, and develop a course that could then be used for later cohorts.

10. **Develop SMART marketing goals:** This recommendation is not based on the marketing survey results, but based on what I have seen, I highly recommend this course of action. Having written goals will help you catch new marketing personnel or contractors up to speed quickly in what you want to accomplish and when. It will also serve as a guide for the faculty and a benchmark with which to measure the results of your future campaigns. I recommend carefully developing your goals including what your target markets are, who you want to target, how and when you want to target them, and what you will consider success.

Sweet 16

1. **Complete a follow up survey with additional details:** I recommend developing another survey (whether using the same survey or developing a new survey) to capture information from the current cohort. This should be a strategy of actively gathering data about the students in the program and analyzing the data in a similar fashion as this survey. The more data we get, the better informed we will be about the market and how effective our efforts are.

2. **Optimize web content to favor "interest," "flexibility," and "relevance to employment" (in that order):** The survey identified "Interest in the subject matter" as the key reason for interest in the program, and "relevance to employment" as the second most influential reason. This should guide how we develop our web and print content, and may guide the questions we ask in testimonials.

3. **Actively market to teachers—key word is *actively*—key message should be "flexibility":** Current teachers are teaching during the day, and have their evenings open to study and improve their education. The flexibility of our online program is critical for this group. I don't think we're doing anything to "actively" pursue current teacher though. I recommend a campaign that digs up email addresses for teachers (highly available on the internet; I already started a list for local teachers) and start sending marketing content.

4. **Actively recruit from campus-based groups:** Several students were involved in higher education in various groups around campus including RCDE, CIDI, adjunct professors, etc. We should try to identify these key groups and start developing relationships or spreading marketing content to them to try to capture first and second master's degree candidates.

5. **Use the Google Anlaytics data to identify key referrals:** Google analytics has a "referrals" section that lets you track down the origin of your website traffic. I recommend an analysis of the referrals section to find out where our traffic is coming from and what our presence is on those 3rd party sites, with an ultimate goal of trying to optimize those sites to improve referrals.

6. **Offer to do in-service trainings:** One way to develop relationships with local k-12 schools is to offer our services and valuable knowledge for free. Our professors are engaged in interesting research that may be of benefit to current teachers in the public school system; our faculty also represents a wealth of knowledge of best practices in teaching, lesson development, etc. Offering these for teacher in-service trainings can help spread the word about our program to future students, open up possible project ideas, and improve our public relations.

7. **Optimize for two major differentiators "fully online program" and "commercial":** These were already mentioned above, but we should take these two key differentiators and optimize our web content to call them out like crazy.

8. **Flesh out all program options:** One student mentioned a weekend program. I had no idea that this was even an option—maybe it isn't and they were just confused. Whatever the case, we should make it very clear what all the possible options are that students can do (e.g. face-to-face vs. hybrid vs. online vs. weekend; or education-centered vs. commercial-centered content, etc.).

9. **Identify how we stack up in-state and out-of-state tuition:** Some of the responses we received on the survey noted that one of the major factors that influenced their

enrollment was the inexpensive tuition. To go along with the #8 from the Top Ten list, we should research the tuition prices of each of those programs, as well as out of state options. This will give us a good idea where we sit with respect to students inside the state of Utah looking at us and trying to differentiate with us, UofU and BYU. It will also help us understand where we stand with out of state students looking out of their own home state to other online or f2f options. I have a sneaking suspicion that we come in cheapest in the State and even cheaper than a variety of out of state options.

10. **Define the MLTID degree:** As an option, the MLTID degree is very ambiguous. I even put it on my master's final report, but they ended up giving me a MS even still. On the survey, there were very few people (3/65) that put down MLTID as their degree path. I think it would be very helpful to define this for students on the website. The current definition is ambiguous and doesn't really say how the MLTID is differentiated over the MS degree path; in fact, the introductions are identical. Is this supposed to be a commercial based degree? We should figure that out and then push it for those students who it makes sense for.

11. **Encourage participation in the multimedia minor:** I'm convinced that many undergraduate students don't consider our program because they don't have any idea that it exists. I was interested enough in teaching/training as an undergraduate that I probably would have considered ITLS as an undergraduate path if it were available and if I knew about it. One of the best ways for students to learn about the program is to get them in the ITLS classroom. Currently, since there's no undergraduate degree—which I think we should change in the long term—we should push the multimedia minor to those same undergraduate groups that we identified in #5 of the Top Ten.

12. **Is an online PhD program even realistic?** Several students asked about an online PhD program in their survey responses. What do we think? Does this make sense to develop an online PhD program? If we developed a solid online PhD program, it would certainly be a huge competitive advantage in the State and even in the industry.

13. **Start generating content:** One of the best ways to improve the "findability" of our website is to start generating content. Google's business is to usher searchers to the most relevant and valuable content based on their search terms. No one really knows how their algorithms work, and they keep things pretty close to the chest about how they work, but one of the things they've mentioned is that companies/organizations that produce valuable content will be ranked higher in search results. When I say content I mean a blogs and/or pages on our site (this is why it's critical to have the blog and the website on the same platform and not split off into a free blogging site like it is now; our current site is not collecting the SEO benefit of the blog content we're posting). For frequency, we're talking at least once a week if not more. Topics could be new research, travel reports, event highlights, content curation, teaching tips, instructional design tips, new methods, etc. The content doesn't have to be long, or novel, it just has to be valuable for the industry.

14. **Improve content in the following areas:** Scholarships available, student research possibilities, flexibility of online program, what can be done with the degree following graduation. Each of these areas were highlighted by student responses as areas that need improvement/clarification on the site or in orientation materials.

15. **Actively identify Google Search terms that can be optimized for:** Two students identified the exact search terms that they used (this might also be a great question for a follow up survey). One student searched on "online instructional design degrees;" another student put "Masters education programs/100% online/not requiring that had a teaching degree or certified teacher to be admitted." I don't entirely know which part of that last one was

searched on, or perhaps all of it, but this gives us a small window into what future students are searching on. We should include the search terms that make sense in our meta keywords and optimize the page content (just means using them often without overusing them).

16. **Discover how we're being portrayed on USU's and RCDE's website:** Several student responses cited going through the USU website degree finder of the RCDE website to find our program. We should do some research to find out how we're being portrayed on each of these location (and others), make sure we're being portrayed well and that all content areas are filled in effectively, and strategize if there are better ways to present ourselves on these common referral areas.

7 Don't Dos

- **Don't recruit at universities:** One student recommended recruiting at other universities, but after some consideration, it seems that taking the "dog and pony show" on the road would turn about the same results as it does by doing it at the USU campus, but it would just be more expensive and time consuming to do it on the road. I think there are ways that we can actively solicit recruitment at other universities without doing it in person. Improving the website's findability is probably the best one, as well as developing relationships with the USU extensions, sending brochures, etc.
- **Don't exhibit at graduate fairs:** The survey results showed no students that came into the program from graduate fairs. I recommend that we don't exhibit at these. The only one that might make sense is the one held at USU. But even then, as it currently stands, I would not put too much effort into it. Now, there is a caveat. Events are about presentation just as much as they are about content. From the pictures that I've seen of our booths, we come across as being bland and empty, and that has a mental reflection on our program without even interacting with our booth personnel. If we were to throw some money (around $1500-2000 would probably do, maybe more) at the issue to make our booth look fuller and more professional, we may be able to recruit better at it. Testimonials on a video monitor could go a long way to persuade the passerby to stop and watch.
- **Don't advertise:** It's expensive, and takes a lot of work for little return. We might be able to come up with some advertising locations that could make sense, but as a rule I'd lean toward not doing traditional advertising. Under the assumption that one of the best ways to get in front of undergraduates and involved teachers is at USU sporting events, I looked into what it costs to advertise at the Spectrum. Even with the department discount, it was expensive… very expensive. The only thing I think I'd recommend trying is taking an ad out in the Utah Statesman and try to calculate the return from that.
- **Don't go with interns:** They don't know what they're doing, it's as simple as that. Unless the marketing program has changed since I went through, they teach you a bunch of business theory, but next to nothing in tactics. Interns are valuable resources for grunt work and birddogging things, but if you're expecting them to come up with vision, perform complex marketing analysis, etc. they won't be able to pull it off simply because they don't know how to do it. It helps to have a mentor that can watch over their work and provide guidance, training, and suggestions for improvement.

- **Don't brush off students:** Don't do it ever. Many of the student responses to the survey cited positive personal interactions with faculty or staff. Some of those interactions happened many years ago and those students are now entering the program when it makes sense for them. I think you're doing an excellent job with this, but just as a reminder, every person you talk to is a future student; every phone conversation, email response, or face to face interaction could turn into an enrollment. Ensure that each of these is a positive, helpful experience.
- **Don't try to bootstrap your marketing:** My current manager used to work for ICON, a multi-million (possibly billion) dollar corporation. He said that they used 20% of their revenue in marketing. That is a staggering amount! And that's also about average in any commercial industry that values marketing. On the flip side, I've been a part of two companies so far that have shackled their marketing due to budget. At the first sign of trouble, the first thing that goes is the marketing budget and there's always this sense of frugality and bootstrapping. While I agree that every dollar spent should be in the most effective manner, I don't think that *doing it cheap* is the most effective way to spend that dollar. If you're operating on a small marketing budget, which ITLS appears to be doing, it's my professional opinion that it will be far more effective to select one maybe two areas that will provide the most impact to enrollment and/or need the most help, and focusing on that area(s) with *all* the marketing budget. That way you do one impactful thing really, really well, as opposed to doing a lot of things not well at all.
- **Don't select the wrong marketing firm:** We discussed this in one of our meetings, but if you decide to go with a marketing firm to redo your website (which I highly recommend unless you can find a very accomplished web developer that can do it for the right price) or make some brochures a marketing firm, you need to select the right one. Top on this list is that the marketing firm should not develop the website on a proprietary platform (it should be WordPress, Drupel, HTML5 or some common web development platform), and they should not own the IP in any way. If things go south and you decide to part ways, you should ensure that you will have full access to the improvements that you have paid for. About the only thing this company should want in return, other than your money, is permission to put the work they do for you in their portfolio.

Next Steps

This concludes the analysis of the survey results. As mentioned somewhere up above, I'd recommend continually surveying the students from the current cohorts. This could be done with the same survey or modifying it to refine the data we're receiving. The more data we can gather, the better picture you will have of how students are finding us and making their selection to join the ITLS program.

As you look through the results, I've provided a significant number of recommendations. Some of them could be very quick to implement, but others require a major strategy change or would require major projects to complete. Implementing any or all of these suggestions is obviously up to your discretion. I recommend a meeting to discuss the ones that make most sense for your faculty and staff.

As for my assistance with carrying out any of these recommendations, my schedule is tightening up, and I may not have as much time as I once thought to really dig in and get my hands dirty. I have no problem directing the efforts of interns, marketing reps, or assisting with a marketing agency. I can offer limited services, the scope of which will have to be determined on a case by case basis.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the recommendations or analyses listed in this report, please feel free to contact me at any time.

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