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## ***Maximizing Your Industrial Advisory Board***

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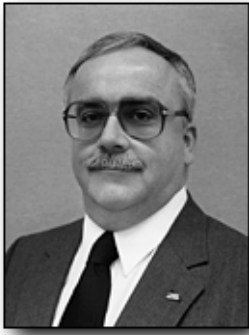
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## Introduction

Industrial Technology Programs “maintain” an Industrial Advisory Board (IAB) on their “books”, fulfilling the NAIT accreditation standards and meeting several times a year. The NAIT requirements for IAB’s provide the basic structure for organizing the board, however, today more than ever, a powerful and influential advisory board is essential to program success and advancement. Technology and industries are changing unpredictably and at exponential rates. These advances are changing the skill sets sought after in the workplace, and quickly impacting higher education. Curriculums, competencies, and technologies which were exclusively Industrial Technology’s realm yesterday, are being offered by Computer Science, Engineering, Accounting, and Statistics departments throughout the nation and online. “This greater acceptance of technology across the population will have an obvious influence on the knowledge and skills of the future workforce and the level of training that is required” (Information Technology, 1998, p. 1). The involved, proactive IAB, is an important tool for Industrial Technology programs. This article will address the interrelationship of the NAIT accreditation standards and IAB’s with emphasis on how to maximize the role of the IAB for program enhancement.

# Maximizing Your Industrial Advisory Board

By Dr. John Allen Marshall

## The Challenge of Technological Relevancy

To gain an appreciation for the rapid advancements in technology, one merely has to recall the phenomenal progress experienced in computer processing. Consider a comparison between a now antiquated 486 micro-processor and the fifty year old ENIAC, commonly thought of as the first modern computer.

It took up more space than an 18-wheeler’s tractor-trailer, weighed more than 17 Chevrolet Camaros, and consumed 140,000 watts of electricity. ENIAC could execute up to 5,000 basic arithmetic operations per second. The 486 is built on a tiny piece of silicon about the size of a dime. It weighs less than a packet of Sweet ‘N Low, and uses less than 2 watts of electricity. A 486 can execute up to 54,000,000 instructions per second. (Pritchett, 1994, p. 4)

All sectors of our society are feeling the impact of technological driven change. As technology proliferates and international competition intensifies, the effects are being felt in higher education, business, and industry. Industrial Technology programs however, more so than most Baccalaureate Degrees must keep pace with these advances in order to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. “As a part of our daily lives we come into contact with technology in some form constantly. This contact with technology will only increase as technology develops to match industry demands” (Information Technology, 1998, p. 1).

The challenges of accelerated technology can be overwhelming. “While part of the problem is the result of technological developments, another significant factor is the massive increase in world-wide competition

during the last 25 years” (Akinkuoye, 1994, p. 12). The bottom line for Industrial Technology programs is that trends towards lower enrollments, lack luster budgets, massive technological advances, coupled with other infringing disciplines, quickly equals antiquation and obsolescence.

It is critical for technology instructors to maintain “cutting edge” knowledge and skills in order to keep the curriculum current and students effectively prepared for the workplace. “Industry must take a leading role in the structure and administration of future training for that industry” (Introduction, 1998, p. 2). The IAB link between our programs and the technology users is an essential bridge requiring our attention and efforts.

## NAIT Accreditation Standards and the Role of the Industrial Advisory Board

The essential bridge between technology programs and technology users is identified in the NAIT accreditation standards that discuss the formation and conduct of IAB’s. These standards mandate that accreditation and reaccreditation self studies include evidence related to how the IAB’s were formed and maintained. The supporting documentation should address member selection, length of appointment, committee organization and responsibilities, frequency of meetings, and method of conducting business.

The IAB must meet at least once a year and play an active role in validating the program content. NAIT accreditation standards also require that self studies include minutes from these meeting showing agendas, actions taken, and recommendations made.

## Maximizing the Advisory Board Functions

Five key characteristics can be used to measure the success of a program's IAB. These indicators of "IAB maximization" include: involvement, insight, influence, income, and program advocacy. Armed with this level of contribution, the IAB can advance curriculums and accomplish the goal of providing the most relevant and employable graduates possible. The overall educational process should "improve the knowledge and skills of the individual", which in turn should "increase productivity and efficiency gains achieved at the workplace through the individual applying their newly acquired knowledge and skills" (Introduction, 1998, p. 2).

Specific recommendations from the IAB to the program should address the needs of the students and local businesses and industries. Specific activities of the advisory board are shown in Table 1.

Most industrial leaders consider it an honor to serve on an educational advisory board, a form of professional responsibility. "Industry is the sole target for the product of industrial technology programs and, therefore, has an obligation to provide support and recognition for those programs that supply them with qualified employees" (Kicklighter, 1987, p.16).

Much of the success or failure of an IAB will rest with the quality and motivation of its members. The goal is to select people who are generally on the upper end of the career ladder, who have a broad view of industry, who have control of their schedule, and who have a wide range of contacts in their segment of industry.

### Member Profile and Selection

The selection process for advisory board members is critical. Recall, it is more than just a member. You are recruiting three essential ingredients. The personal abilities and influence of the member; their companies' prestige, experience and resources; and the representation of that industrial sector on the board.

Board members need to bring involvement to the board. They

**Table 1. Activities of the Advisory Board**

1. providing leadership in the areas of program and curriculum matters.
2. assisting in promoting the department's goals and objectives within the business and industrial community.
3. assisting in locating and securing equipment, external funding, and software donations to maintain a "state-of-the-art" industrial technology program.
4. providing guidance in the translation of students to professionals (NSBE Purdue, 1998, p. 2).

**Table 2. Advisor Board Member Attributes**

1. Personal Abilities and Influence
  - Involvement/Active Role
  - Spirited Commitment
  - Influence/Motivate Others
2. Prestige, Experience, and Resources
  - Community Recognition
  - Knowledge and Expertise
  - Asset to the Organization
3. Industrial Sector Representation
  - Exemplify Program Areas

**Table 3. Member Selection Process**

1. Brainstorm Possible Candidates
  - Aim High, Consider Table Two Attributes
2. Send Invitation Letter
  - Include Compelling Reasons
3. Telephone Call Follow-ups
  - Email Will Avoid Phone Tag
4. Send Confirmation Letter
  - Identifying the First Meeting Date

need to "help forge consensus opinion and spirited commitment, and seek opportunities to apply their own areas of expertise to the benefit of the organization" (Hinman, 1993, p.1). Consider charismatic political leaders who have demonstrated support for higher education.

Board members must have influence in the community. They need to bring to the institution contacts and leads. They need to know with whom to talk, about what topics, in what way, and at the right time. They need to help persuade,

excite, re-direct, or rally, as needed, on behalf of the organization. Board members need to talk positively about their organization, gaining valuable word-of-mouth support. Board members also should identify and bring to the organization other influential leaders in the community, who in turn can give it these same elements. (Hinman, 1993, p. 1)

All faculty must take an active role in the selection process and understand the essential nature of the board. An initial brainstorming session will result

in the identification of possible candidates. Remember to aim high, considering influence, politics and personal commitment to the educational process. Develop a letter of intent, which identifies the many compelling reasons to consider this admirable task, and mention the early dedication commitment of well-respected individuals or companies.

This initial invitation to participate may require several follow-up communications. Once a representative group has been formulated, send thank you letters with potential dates and formats for the initial meeting. As the first meeting approaches, packets with information on your program and curriculum will focus their attention and remind them of the importance of their participation at the upcoming event.

The participation of IAB members should include enjoyable visits to campus and provide insights into recreational opportunities. Keep in mind that members may be interested in sporting events and cultural activities in the area. Some board members may be drawn to your geographical region by other interests such as hobbies, or friends and relatives attending the institution.

At the initial meeting, support staff and faculty should greet arrivals in an attractive meeting room. Name cards with affiliations for everyone should be prepared in advance. This initial meeting usually includes introductions and facility tours. Three ring binders with the university logo are a nice organizational gift to the members. Prepare the binders with labeled sections and pre-punch all documentation for this, and subsequent meetings. Labeled sections may include "minutes", "member directory", "goals & objective", and "committee reports". During this initial meeting, three essential committees should be formulated to focus the board's activities, and serve as the catalyst for program advancements. These core committees will address the areas of curriculum, resource development, and public relations.

### ***Focusing the Advisory Board***

Defining committee members, committee leaders, and committee tasks are key ingredients in establishing a proactive board. Identifying desirable outcomes, discussing methods and approaches, and assigning specific deliverables will encourage involvement and provide positive results.

**Curriculum Committee.** The purpose of this committee is to provide an employer's point of view relating to a current and relevant curriculum. Areas of investigation include the curriculum requirements for general education, the technical core, and the specialization courses in the Industrial Technology program.

The Board members represent cutting edge companies that rely on state-of-the-art technologies to survive. These technologies need to be an integral component of the curriculums. "There is no shortage of technology in America. There is however, a distribution problem. And one way to break the logjam is to get the right people talking" (Meyer, 1992, p. 13).

A primary committee activity will involve identifying the skill sets needed by program graduates, and accordingly revising program competencies. Accurate competency identification serves as the catalyst for curriculum improvement. These specific "competencies can be used to access further training and employment opportunities" (Australian, 1998, p. 1).

**Resource Development Committee.** The purpose of this committee is to assist in obtaining external resources both financial and in the form of

expertise. The fast pace of changes in high technology coupled with less than realistic budgets make it very difficult to provide hands-on experiences with emerging technologies. In fact, few IT programs have the ability to purchase emerging technologies. An active IAB, comprised of significant corporate leaders, can serve as a valuable tool in providing support and resources.

In addition to financial contributions, IAB's are an excellent source for equipment and human expertise. Monetary contributions may be in the form of: financial funding for specific items; funding for general account; supplier/manufacturer donations or cost reductions; scholarships; and establishing foundations for future contributions. A contribution from the members themselves is a discussion that usually occurs several months into the process to prevent scaring potential members away. Companies are deluged with requests for donations. Give them time to become an integral part of the group and experience the non-monetary benefits they have contributed.

Equipment and technology resources include the donation of good quality used equipment and time-sharing or loaning high technology equipment. Questions you need to be able to respond to include: what are the tax incentives related to supplier and manufacturer donations and discounts; and will donations qualify under current tax guidelines?

Human expertise found or supplied by the IAB can come in many forms. The years of experience represented on the Board can be utilized in the form of

***Table 4. Focusing the Advisory Board***

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Curriculum Committee           | Identifying Skill Sets/Competencies<br>Current and Relevant Curriculum |
| 2. Resource Development Committee | Financial/Scholarships<br>Equipment Donations<br>Human Expertise       |
| 3. Public Relations Committee     | Promote Program<br>Promote Graduates<br>Newsletters/Networking         |

guest speakers, adjunct faculty members, or a source for the next guided plant tour. These individuals also represent companies well suited for student internships, faculty member sabbaticals, and opportunities for faculty consulting.

#### **Public Relations Committee.**

The purpose of this committee is to promote the department's students and services to the business and industrial communities. This can be accomplished by focusing on strategies to increase the Industrial Technology profile and promote the services and value of its graduates. Many industries are unaware of valuable expertise available within our field.

This committee can organize and sponsor seminars on topics such as ISO 9000, quality control, hazardous materials, Internet commerce, or electronic data interchange. Student involvement through NAIT, SME, and other student groups is very beneficial. Students should be an integral component in most promotional events.

A mailing list should be developed along with a newsletter to inform interested individuals and companies of events, opportunities, and program needs. The newsletter is an excellent forum to highlight advancements. Recognition of contributions and contributors is also very important. This recognition not only serves as a reward for those who have helped, but also as motivation for others to become

involved. Publicity is critical. The more people made aware of the needs the more likely a contribution, particularly if the need is specific and well defined. It doesn't pay to be shy about your needs.

#### **Conclusions**

The fast pace of change in high technology coupled with less than realistic budgets make it very difficult to provide hands-on experiences with emerging technologies. Curriculums, competencies, and technologies evolve quickly and the distinct lines that once existed between different disciplines are fading.

An active, well focused Industrial Advisory Board, comprised of significant corporate leaders who demonstrate involvement, influence, insight, and program advocacy will lead to current and relevant curriculums. A dedicated board will also serve as an accelerated mechanism for obtaining program resources, and highly sought after graduates. Taking the time to focus and maximize your Industrial Advisory Board is an essential ingredient in program revitalization and advancement.

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