AST YEAR THE IOWA ALPHA CHAPTER of Tau Beta Pi became aware of an alarming trend in our membership. The number of eligible students who complete all requirements and become members through initiation has been sharply declining in recent years. At the 2000 District conference, we realized that this problem is not specific to our chapter alone. Moreover, after discussions with other organizations on campus, we realized this growth in apathy is seen in almost every volunteer organization. Iowa Alpha received a GIG Chapter Project Grant to study the reasons for this trend.

THE SURVEY
Iowa Alpha chose to collect data via a survey mailed to randomly selected undergraduate students from all majors. The survey contained four parts. The first part inquired about general information of each participant. Questions were concerned with the participants’ majors, year in school, time spent at school, and time spent at jobs. The next part asked questions about what companies look for when hiring new employees and how this affects the participants’ choice of which organizations to join. The third part asked participants to answer questions about one specific organization to which they belong. They were asked to rank such things as social activities, résumé building, and gaining technical skills as reasons for being involved. These questions were designed to establish why they joined the organization and what they have gained from staying active in the group. The final part of the survey asked participants to select one group that they had considered joining or did join, but in which they no longer participated. There were questions similar to those in part three, as well as a place for participants to provide open-ended explanations as to why they decided not to be active.

SENDING THE SURVEY
In the process of trying to acquire the random sample of names and sending out the surveys, the GIG committee learned a great deal about the hierarchy of the university system and the chain of approval needed to conduct a study. Most of February and March, 2001, was spent trying to track down university officials and employees for signatures of project approval. The first step we took in the process was to register for a business-reply code that could be placed on the envelopes. By using the reply code, we were charged only for those surveys that were returned. After the code was acquired, 800 surveys were printed. The next step was to obtain a list of 800 undergraduate students who would be asked to participate in the survey. This posed the greatest delay in the process. We started with the statistics department, which started the chain of referrals through the undergraduate research center, office of the vice-provost of undergraduate affairs, human subjects committee, and finally the office of the registrar. After many signatures and delays from moving offices, the approvals were attained for the registrar to provide the list of 800 names. On March 28 the surveys were mailed. On April 3, the first eight surveys were returned. By May 1, nearly 80 surveys had been returned, of which 72 contained viable data.

RESULTS
As the surveys started to accumulate, we entered the results in a spreadsheet and began to analyze the information. In general, through all parts of the survey, we found no appreciable difference in the responses among different age groups or majors. From the second part of the survey, we identified student attitudes about what companies look for and, if this parallels, what students seek in organizations. The number one response to what companies seek was interpersonal communication skills, followed by job experience and skills. Grade point average and extra-curricular activities were not highly rated as factors that companies consider.

Because Tau Beta Pi is an honor society that performs service, we were saddened to find that community service was by far the lowest-ranked characteristic, being ranked as one of the least important by more than half the participants. This trend was mirrored in the responses for what students look for in organizations. Once again, obligation to the community was the lowest-ranked motivator for joining groups. Students rank the top two criteria that they seek in groups as personal satisfaction and meeting new people. Building their résumés and social activities were also highly ranked reasons for joining.

From the third and fourth parts of the survey, we also learned what activities students participate in for their selected organizations. Groups that students joined had many social activities and speakers as well as educational activities. In groups not joined by students, the organizations were viewed to have primarily business meetings and very few social activities. This agrees with the earlier results that showed students are mainly interested in personal enjoyment and friends when looking for groups to join.

In parts three and four, participants were also asked how they became aware of the group. They were given options of posters, letters, teachers, friends, clubfest, and
the Internet. For the organizations students joined, the responses showed that a vast majority heard of the group through friends and personal invitations. There was only one occurrence where a student joined a group he heard about through a letter or email. In part four, students were asked why they did not join a specific organization. Some common responses were that either they didn’t want to pay money to join or that they were not aware of enough benefits for it to be worth the effort. There were also responses relating to an overly elaborate initiation process and members who were unpleasant to be around. The most frequent response, given by one third of the participants, was that they did not have enough time to be involved in any more activities.

SYNOPSIS AND CONCLUSION
In short, there are a few things we can learn from this survey. First of all, students look primarily for enjoyment as they decide how to spend their free time. Secondly, the practice of sending letters to attract initiates is probably not the most effective method. We probably cannot overcome the lack of time in students’ lives, but we can hope to create better uses of their time for the benefit of the students, Tau Beta Pi, and, most importantly, the community.

ADDITIONAL SPECIALTIES ARE OF STUDY:
biomedical imaging manufacturing engineering
computer science VLSI design
computer aided engineering creative technologies
computer networks robotics and automation
construction engineering systems architecture
earthquake engineering software engineering
engineering management

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About the GIG Program
The purpose of the Greater Interest in Government Program, established in 1969 by Frederick A. Faville, Illinois Beta ’19, is to stimulate interest in civic affairs and public-policy issues among student members of Tau Beta Pi.

The Executive Council awards annual grants of up to $750 each for these activities from the investment earnings of the Greater Interest in Government Fund.