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DeVry finds its higher ed market niche

Steve Sinovic — Staff Writer

With two years of student success under its belt, DeVry University sees the Fresno area as a good place to grow its business.

The Illinois-based national college system is marking its third academic year in the central San Joaquin Valley with the majority of its students opting for the business and management bachelor's degree programs. The local campus touts its high placement rate for students upon graduation.

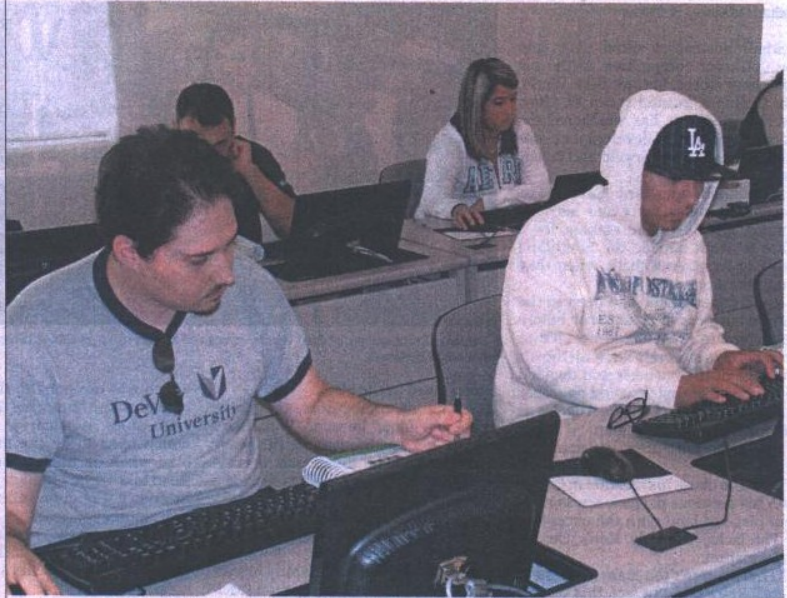
For the popular business and management degree requiring eight semesters, total tuition is \$51,650. Many students obtain loans and grants to complete their degrees; a smaller percentage receives assistance from employers.

DeVry is the newcomer to the local crop of for-profit education providers. It joins established players such as National University, the University of Phoenix, Heald College and Chapman University.

Collectively, they are catering to a growing market for their services. The National Center for Education Statistics predicts the number of adults 25 years and older who will be attending college by 2014 will increase by 20 percent.

While schools both private and public are gearing up to serve these learners, the for-profits market aggressively to this demographic. In 2006, Eduventures of Boston estimated that the publicly traded degree-granting companies made in excess of \$18 billion.

Most for-profits have a majority of part-time fac-



DeVry | 18 Students at the DeVry University Fresno. Business and information technology are popular majors.

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ulty, work hard to keep class sizes small and offer some online degree programs; however, they usually charge more per-credit hour than public institutions.

Clearly, the schools are going after a niche market. While their enrollments still are very small compared to the schools that are here, one campus dean said, "Packaging academic programs in an accelerated time frame with highly focused, more personal and smaller classes" is not an accidental business model.

That's according to Joseph Coppola, dean of DeVry University Fresno. The campus opened in September 2005. DeVry outgrew this site and moved to its current location at 7575 N. Fresno Street. "We purposely moved to a building [a leased space] that gives us room to grow," Coppola said. Indeed, the local campus has had to secure extra spaces in the parking lot to accommodate a growing student body and staff. As a business operating locally, Coppola said the campus has come to rely on several vendors: security, building maintenance and office supply providers.

Locally, DeVry employs about 55 to 60 people, Coppola said. The majority are part-time faculty members who combine general education skills with programmatic knowledge. "For example, the person teaching our psychology classes works as a social worker," Coppola said. "Our electronics instructor works for Motorola."

Coppola has a bachelor's degree from Fresno Pacific University. His master's degree is in theology

from Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. His career in education has involved teaching at both the elementary school and collegiate levels. He has been a dean since just after his 30th birthday; he is now 35. Coppola started with DeVry in July 2005.

He said his greatest passion is to mentor staff and faculty so they become the best they can be. "I want them to be that favorite teacher our students will remember for the rest of their lives."

Coppola still teaches two to three classes a year at DeVry to stay fresh, know the students and relate to faculty. "There is nothing worse than an out-of-touch administrator," he said.

DeVry University fall 2006 undergraduate enrollment at its Northern California locations was 1,965 students. This includes enrollment at the school's Fremont, San Francisco, Sacramento and Fresno locations. DeVry locations in San Jose and Bakersfield were not opened until 2007.

A public relations spokesman for the Northern California Metro division declined to provide numbers on individual center enrollments.

Nationwide, more than 48,000 students are enrolled at DeVry's 87 locations in 25 states and Canada, as well as through DeVry University Online. The university is a subsidiary of DeVry Inc. (NYSE: DV), which is also the holding company for Ross University, Chamberlain College of Nursing and Becker Professional Review.

Kandy Simmons, president of DeVry University Northern California, said the company does a lot of research before entering a new market. "We're impressed with the economic growth

in Fresno and the diversification of the economy that's occurred in the past few years," Simmons said.

She said the DeVry business approach puts a lot of emphasis on student job and career placement. Overall, "DeVry places 90 percent of its students in their fields of study," Simmons said, noting the Northern California region helps place 92 percent of the grads in their fields, earning an average salary of \$46,000. "You can't do this if you're graduating 1,000 kids a year," she added.

While DeVry serves many constituencies — students, shareholders and employees — focusing on the needs of the local business community is equally important.

One of the first things DeVry does when it enters a community is create an employer advisory commit-

tee. "Their input is seen across our curriculum," Simmons said. It's an integral part of DeVry to offer education that's relevant to business and industry, Simmons said. She said the company updates its program content every two years.

"This is something unheard of in traditional education and private college programs," she asserted.

Indeed, Coppola said the local campus will probably add one or two new programs in the next academic year. "We have a lot of diverse, highly skilled labor needs here," he said, referring to the manufacturing, agricultural, utility and correctional sectors.

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