

By Erin Einhorn
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Here's the SAT question:
What is to higher education as Los Angeles is to show business, Paris is to fashion and Washington is to politics?

"There's only one answer," says Patrick Moscaritolo, "and that answer is Boston."

Moscaritolo is president of Boston's Convention and Visitors Bureau, and that quiz is part of his shtick.

"We have a quarter-million kids that call Boston home from August to May or June," Moscaritolo boasted. "There are 50 colleges within 50 square miles. That makes us America's college town."

The "us alone" is implied.

Well, guess what, Boston.

Some studies say Philadelphia has more students than Boston does — and that Boston has fewer students than Moscaritolo claims. Philadelphia, too, could rightly be called America's college town.

Trouble is, few here seem to know it.

No one coordinates visits by perspective students to ease the planning of multi-campus tours.

No one represents all area schools at international college fairs.

No one hosts a massive food-and-freebies fest to welcome new students.

And no one has created a Web site link to all Philadelphia colleges at once.

Boston has all of the above.

economic engine, spends \$40,000 a year attending college fairs in foreign countries, said MassPort spokeswoman Laura White.

Armed with "Discover Massachusetts: A world class education" brochures, the agency, along with the Massachusetts Education & Finance Authority, last year visited nine foreign cities to plug the state's 63 schools.

"We have found that students who come to school here and then go back to their own home ... may be back in touch with colleagues to start businesses, sell products," White said. "It makes good economic sense to foster that kind of back-and-forth."

Not only that, but foreign students — all foreign visitors for that matter — are likely to spend money while they're here, buying expensive airfare and the American goods that are so much cheaper here than abroad.

Pennsylvania had 18,000 foreign students during the 1996-1997 school year, according to the Institute of International Education. Collectively, they spent \$392 million on tuition, room and board and other expenses.

Compare that to Massachusetts, which had 26,500 foreign students. Their economic impact? A whopping \$607 million in 1996-1997.

Student-friendly town

It's not just foreign students who have an economic impact. It's all of them, their parents and their friends.

The Boston visitors bureau determined that the average out-of-state undergrad is visited by his or her parents eight times during a four-year course of study, with parental spending during those visits topping

a massive marketing event for college students.

In Boston, she attracts 25,000 students a year with the lure of popular bands and free food. Students sample the goods of local businesses, collect freebies, meet each other and — right at the beginning of the year — start to enjoy what Boston has to offer.

An event like the one in Boston would serve Philadelphia well, said Muldoon, from the Philadelphia visitors bureau.

"If we could create a sense of being in a college town, we could get the people — they got money in their pockets, or at least two-thirds of them do — we could get them to shop, to be doing entertainment, to create a sense of energy that you get from college people, people in their twenties."

Campus visits

When Stephanie Esposito started her job in sales at the Clarion Suites in Philadelphia's Chinatown, her bosses asked her to reach out to college students and their parents.

But students — the current ones on campuses across the region, and the prospective ones across the country and the world — are a tough market to reach, she said.

For their part, students have difficulty deciding which hotel to stay in during campus visits, or where to find accommodations for mom and dad.

In Boston, that gap has been filled by a privately run program called Campus Visit.

Funded by 15 participating schools, the visitors bureau, and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and

How Boston built a better student magnet

It's all about image, as Philly is learning

Some Philadelphia promoters, like the city's Commerce Department and the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation, have recently put students and their parents on their radar screens as potential tourists, consumers and — ideally — residents.

As they attempt to capture this crucial market, Boston's experience might offer a few clues.

Collegietown, USA

In recent years, the opportunities associated with "Philadelphia the College Town" have triggered a few new programs.

This year, for the first time, eight Philadelphia colleges and universities hosted a joint tour of their campuses for high school guidance counselors from around the world. Catholic colleges have been running such tours for U.S. counselors for several years. And this month, three universities — Temple, Drexel and Widener — are hosting a tour.

The Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation has just begun sending its "Loves You Back" Philadelphia literature to area schools. A local newsweekly hosted a small festival for college students. And the city Commerce Department has begun courting student leaders as potential future residents.

It's a start. But consider Boston.

There, educational and economic institutions have conspired for years to promote a student-friendly culture, starting with high-school-age recruits on through to the pomp and circumstance. The result is a youthful flavor that lends the verve a city needs to attract everyone from businesses to residents.

"In Boston," said Tom Muldoon of the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, "there's a sense that people go to Boston, then find a school. Here, the thousands of students who come to study generally come to a particular school, because of that school."

Much of Boston's success has to do with luck — campuses there are closer together than they are in the Philadelphia area. And the smaller city has a closer-knit feel. But some of that success is deliberate.

College fairs

The Massachusetts Port Authority, which runs Boston's airport and seaport and serves as a city

\$20 million a year.

And the campus-visit industry, meaning potential students who come to tour a few colleges as they make their choices, represents another \$89 million annually to the city of Boston.

No one has done that calculation in Philadelphia. But the approximately 220,000 students in the five-county Philadelphia area must eat off-campus sometime. They need to buy clothes, books, beer. They might even take in a movie.

And they get out-of-town visitors. In Pennsylvania, according to the state Department of Education, 20 percent of undergraduates, 23.3 percent of graduate students and 43.4 percent of professional school students hail from elsewhere. But does the business community do anything to maximize this business? To invite it? To encourage it? Betty Fulton says no.

For over a decade, the Boston entrepreneur has run



Promotional brochures like these give Boston an edge in marketing to students.

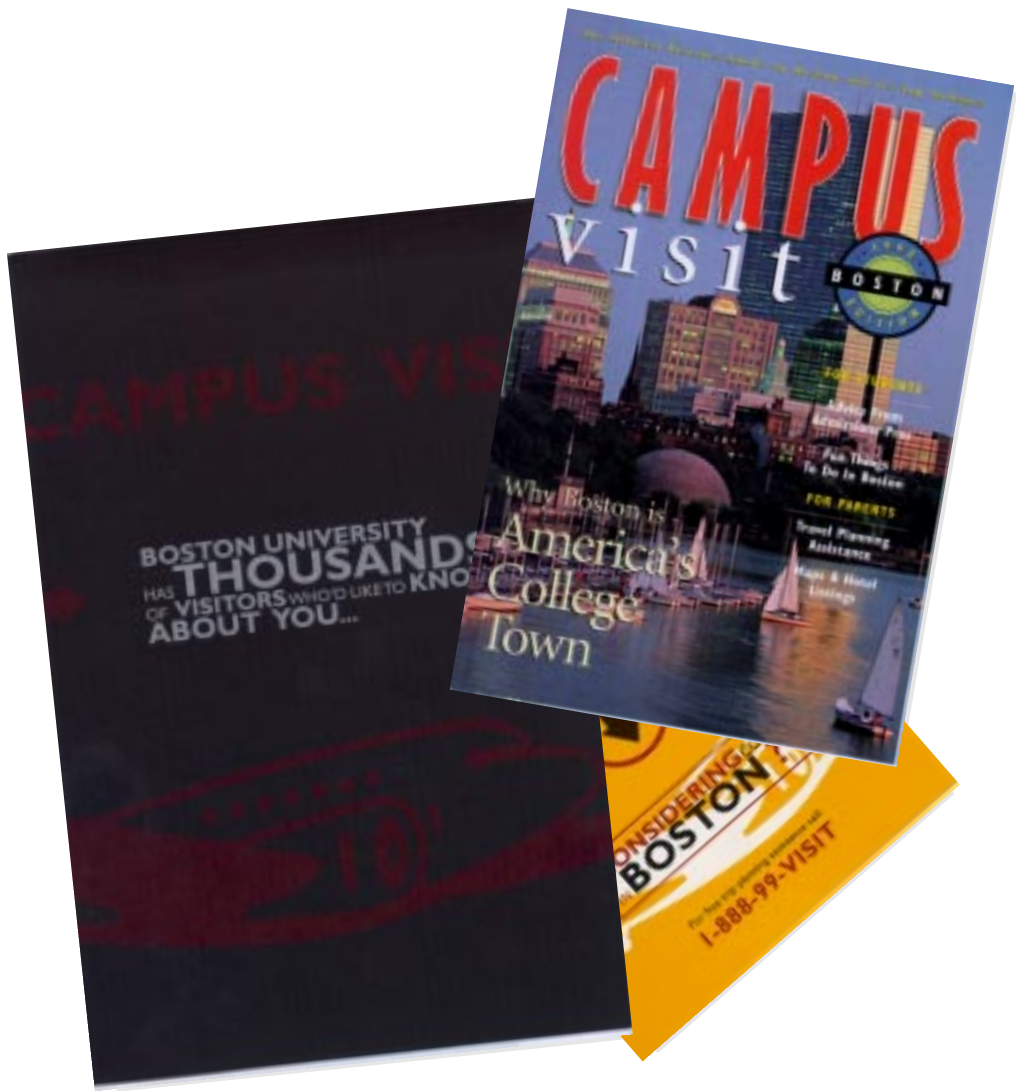
Tourism, Campus Visit serves as a travel agency for students, perspective students and their parents.

It publishes a student-centric visitors guide, runs a Web site with links to Boston-area schools and, through a toll-free number, it books everything from hotel rooms to rental cars for students and their parents, recommending which hotels are closest to which campuses, and which might be the best times to come.

"It's a blessing for Boston," said Moscaritolo, from the visitors bureau. It's also a blessing for schools.

"Prior to Campus Visit, we really had no way to offer parents and students easy access to coming and visiting our campus," said Tim Erickson, the associate admissions director at Boston's Emerson College. "They solve so many of our problems."

When Meryl Levitz, president of the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation, heard about Campus Visit, she groaned. "Philadelphia," she said, "just has a lot of catching up to do." ■



CAMPUS VISIT

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
HAS THOUSANDS
OF VISITORS WHO'D LIKE TO KNOW
ABOUT YOU...

CAMPUS
VISIT

Why Boston is
America's
College
Town

FOR PARENTS
Travel Planning
Assistance
Maps & Hotel
Listings

CONSIDERING
BOSTON

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