

Insight into Recruitment and Retention Efforts in Business Education

Sheri Grotrian, Lisa Parriott, Judy Grotrian, Rachael Cole &
Lindsay Harlow

Peru State College

Abstract: *This paper provides insight into an established successful means in which prospective students are brought to campus and retained. Survey research has been conducted to confirm original anecdotal evidence that suggested a high school business contest hosted at the College is one successful method. Results indicate these type of events enhance positive relationships between colleges and high school instructors/students, leading to enriched student recruitment and retention.*

Key Words: Business education, student engagement, student recruitment

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Knowing overall college enrollments continue to decline these last several years, institutions of higher education continue to search for ways to attract and retain students (Fain, 2017). This continuation of research seeks to expand on depth and detail of how and why a specific recruitment and retention activity has been positively viewed at one institution of higher education. Ideally, understanding more about this success could aid other disciplines in hosting their own thriving activities as well.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Institutions of higher education continue to focus on enrollment management strategies, from the time recruitment takes place through overall attempts of retention of students as well. Recruitment seems to be focused on initially “since enrollment trends often provide one of the earliest and most accurate indications of an institution’s current and potential health” (Gyure & Arnold, 2001, p. 36). By first identifying how to attract students—recruit—and then following through on delivery of a quality experience and education—retain—successful results are likely to be observed. As Elliott and Healy (2001) note, “student recruitment and retention activities are interrelated. The most effective and efficient means of recruiting students is through word-of-mouth promotion which comes from current satisfied students” (p. 10).

Understanding the value of recruitment and retention, colleges and universities continue to seek buy-in from various levels of employees. While there may not be a tried and true model of enrollment management and how it fits within the hierarchy of the campus organization, one notion has been found to be true: there must be a “concerted effort by enrollment management to forge a strong partnership with academic affairs. Because so much of recruitment and retention success relies on the faculty playing an appropriate, meaningful role” (Scannell, 2013, n.p.).

Faculty roles to aid in student recruitment and retention have been addressed in various forms of research. Kinzie (2005) asserts there are nine key items faculty members can do, but these pose some limitation as they are only from the classroom perspective:

1. Embrace undergraduates and their learning
2. Set and maintain high expectations for student performance
3. Clarify what students need to do to succeed
4. Use engaging pedagogical approaches appropriate for course objectives and students’ abilities and learning styles
5. Build on students’ knowledge, abilities, and talents
6. Provide meaningful feedback to students
7. Weave diversity into the curriculum including out-of-classroom assignments
8. Make time for students
9. Hold students accountable for taking the share of the responsibility for their learning

Additionally, faculty members fill a void in recruitment and retention beyond their traditional teaching role. By having appointments with prospective students when they visit campus, to assisting with new student orientation, to advising clubs and organizations, to offering innovative events for community members, to being a trusted confidant for students thousands of miles away from home—the list could go on. Faculty fill a void and offer the connection enrollment management seeks with academic affairs to build a strong connection and lasting bond with students who are not only recruited as freshman, but hopefully retained as “alumni-to-be” (Gyure & Arnold, 2001).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach as the researchers are utilizing qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of the quantitative data (Creswell, 2011). The researchers wanted to gain more detailed responses and explanations regarding positive experiences of the specific high school business contest recruitment and retention activity upon completion of initial quantitative data collection. Quantitative data was collected via database queries and manual searches of older enrollment data. To determine the numbers of business contest students who originally participated in the high school business contest who then went on to enroll at the College, comparisons of business contest database entry form information to College enrollment data were conducted for participants of the 2015, 2016 and 2017 events.

Qualitative data was collected via electronic survey of high school instructors attending the event. Further qualitative data was collected via email survey or in-person interviews of current college students who had previously participated in the event as high school students.

RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS

From the quantitative searches, it was found that 34 students enrolled at the College after having participated in the high school business contest in 2015, 2016, or 2017. Theoretically, this survey data allowed researchers to determine how successful such an endeavor is in attracting potential students. From the original quantitative survey questions, 71 percent said their participating in the high school business contest did assist in their decision to attend the College.

As such, opportunities to enhance such an endeavor were revealed through the qualitative phase of interviews with high school instructors. Some of the highlighted phrases or themes from the interviews that indicate positive results of such an event as a recruitment and retention opportunity for their students include the following: “beautiful campus and strong with business,” “puts into practice what we are studying in the classroom, and I want them to visit campus,” and “two of my students have decided to attend your College after coming to the business contest.” Furthermore, the following response from a high school instructor sums things up nicely:

It is one of the only free business contests in the area and allows me to expose all students that express interest to college campuses and the business contest environment. This allows all students to compete, even the students who have a difficult time with money. And, that you are showing students the advantages they will have in furthering their education. It’s nice to see the College students so friendly and helpful. Our kids never feel intimidated or scared to ask for help.

Indications are clear these events strengthen relationships of the college with high school instructors and high school students. This relationship continues with college students, who were previous high school participants, assisting with the contest and interacting with teachers and high school students and sometimes go on to be graduate students and high school educators as well.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Evidence provided by such a study demonstrates the educational importance. Understanding what has worked in terms of recruitment and retention for one program allows other programs to transfer this knowledge to their own area. Furthermore, when qualitative data is collected, oftentimes more detail is offered by research participants which could lend itself to new thoughts or ideas, and potentially even other areas of research.

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