

# Paying it Forward with Student Engagement in Business Education

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

*Peru State College*

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**Abstract:** *This paper investigates new ways in which prospective students are brought to campus for engaging activities offered by faculty. How they are viewed as being successful can provide further application toward student recruitment.*

**Keywords:** *Business Education; Student engagement; Student recruitment*

## **Purpose of the Study**

So gone are days when recruitment of students was solely viewed as the responsibility of the campus admissions office. With competition to sustain enrollment numbers increasingly important in higher education, campus personnel are widely accepting any opportunity to attract prospective students. Investigating occasions in which prospective students are brought to campus for engaging activities offered by faculty (i.e., a regional high school business contest) and how they are viewed as being successful can provide further application toward student recruitment, and in turn, retention.

## **Review of Relevant Literature**

Knowing that state and federal support of public institutions of higher education continues to decrease, tuition funds are relied upon heavily. As such, ensuring proper recruitment and retention of students can drastically aid in more consistent income for colleges. In more recent years, the notion of enrollment management has surfaced to bring together functions of admissions, student records, and financial aid (Epstein, 2010).

More urgency has been placed on getting faculty involved in student recruitment, *per se*. When searching for faculty roles and opportunities to recruit, much of the literature centers around faculty having appointments with prospective students when they have their traditional campus visits (Hope, 2014; Hoover, 2011; Carter, Lehman & Tremblay, 2008). Evidence demonstrates these type of meetings are critical and can lead to successful recruiting, but what about taking it a step further? As Barnds (2013, n.p.), asserts, "it only makes sense to look to the faculty; they remain the most credible messengers on a college campus." One key strategy discussed by Barnds is to encourage faculty to do what they do best—show off their talents and expertise in a variety of engaging activities. These engaging events may be the next link to getting faculty involved in recruitment at a much higher level.

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sheri Grotrian-Ryan: sgrotrian-ryan@peru.edu*

### Methods

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological case study approach as the researchers sought to investigate experiences and interpretations to questions posed to students in an effort to understand the topic from their everyday knowledge and perceptions (Denscombe, 2004; Stake, 1995). Reflection questions were designed to implore critical thought regarding recruitment/retention beliefs and experiences.

Purposeful questions were asked of students who had participated in the high school business contest offered by the college, who then later enrolled as college students. In addition, insight was sought from students who had graduated to become business teachers, who then later brought their high school classes to participate in the business contest back at their alma mater. This research serves as a snapshot of how other means of engaging opportunities on campus can provide another avenue of recruitment/retention.

### Results/Conclusions

Emergent themes surfaced indicating events such as the high school business contest do serve as a means of recruitment. Student respondents indicated their time on campus provided insight into what their college career could resemble. In addition, the school offers monetary incentive to first-place finishers in the contest, which can be used toward their degree pursuit. Furthermore, the “pay it forward” effect was noted when college students volunteer to work at the high school business contest, who are future educators in the business field, realize the great opportunity for their students once overseeing a high school classroom of their own. The potential cyclical nature to ensure recruitment opportunities is tremendous.

### Implications

The educational importance of this study is demonstrated by the long-term implications of such an event hosted by an institution of higher education. Evidence shows that new high schools have attended the competition due to alumni accepting teaching jobs at schools that otherwise had not been involved. Additionally, upon graduation from high school, students have chosen to pursue their undergraduate degree at this institution after participating/competing in the high school business contest.

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