

“Nobody Comes to Our Events....Anybody Want to Take This Pizza Home:” The Student Engagement Dilemma at The Eastern State University College of Business

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Eastern State University (ESU), a public university with 15,000 students, is located in a small “college” town of 25,000 permanent residents in a Southeastern US State. Over two-thirds of the student body at ESU commute, as the campus is located between two metropolitan areas: fifty miles to the south lies a metro area of 1 million, and, 40 miles to the west is another metro area of 500,000 residents. There is interstate highway access both cities from ESU. The AACSB Accredited College of Business (COB) at ESU has 1,400 students, with majors in accounting, marketing, management, supply chain management, general business and an MBA Program. All classes at ESU are either MW or TTh, which makes it common for student to take a “full-load” by coming to campus only two days/week. Students are busy all day in classes, and seem to head to their cars to head home as soon as their last class ends.

A challenge for ESU College of Business is student engagement in college and departmental activities. Research has long demonstrated a high -level of student engagement is favorable for both the student, and the University. Students gain professional development, leadership skills, and build their resume through involvement. The institution benefits in areas such as retention of students, alumni support, corporate support, internships, scholarships, and the hiring of future graduates. The ESU COB has 6 collegiate professional association chapters such as the Institute of Supply Management and the Financial Management Association, along with 2 honorary business societies, an MBA Society and a new Toastmasters Chapter. These organization’s usually have monthly meetings with a speaker. The COB as a whole sponsors a number of events for all COB students, staff and faculty such a fall football tailgate party, a spring bowling social, a spring barbeque, a food drive, among other activities.

A challenge the ESU COB faces is low attendance and participation at events and activities. Dr. Eric Schexneider, the Associate Dean of the ESU COB, was helping with clean-up after the recent COB Spring Bar-Be-Que when he made this comment: “I see the same 20-30 students at all of our functions. If it were not for the Ambassadors...nobody would come.” Dr. Schexneider is the only employee of the COB with assigned to work on student activities, but this is only one of his duties...he still teaches economics classes too and works on fundraising too. The college did start an Ambassadors Program two years ago, which involved naming 20 student leaders to assist and support school events. As an typical example of participation levels, the ESU COB has 300 marketing majors. Only 35 of those are members of the student marketing association, and it is difficult to get more than 20 at a meeting, according to the organization’s faculty advisor.

Dr. Schexneider has been puzzled about how to get more student engagement as he anticipated the annual planning workshop of the ESU COB’s leadership team (Dean and Dept. Heads). But he had more questions than answers: How aware of ESU COB students of students organizations and their value? If business majors are aware of opportunities presented to them, why do they not participate? What are student attitudes about the value of student activities and events sponsored by the COB? Do students know that holding offices in student organizations helps their resume in a job search? Do we need a marketing plan to increase engagement, and if so, what strategies would the plan include? Dr. Schexneider knew that the COB’s management team would look to him for a plan of action at next week’s meeting.

Keywords: student engagement, student participation, student activities, student organizations, recruiting strategy, market segmentation among business majors.

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

Often face a challenge on the issues of engagement of marketing majors in Department activities. Because student engagement has favorable outcomes for both students and institutions, Marketing faculty and administrators might consider research to learn more about those who participate and those who do not. This Case allows students to apply a market segmentation approach in developing recruiting strategies. Students should be able to relate directly to issues presented in the case.

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