

Date Published 10-1-2013

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Recommended Citation

Pimentel, R. W. (2013). Creating A Pipeline For Business Student Recruitment: Using A Collegiate DECA Chapter For Recruiting High School Students. *Mountain Plains Journal of Business and Economics*, 14(1). Retrieved from <https://openspaces.unk.edu/mpjbt/vol14/iss1/1>

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CREATING A PIPELINE FOR BUSINESS STUDENT RECRUITMENT: USING A COLLEGIATE DECA CHAPTER FOR RECRUITING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The College Choice Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior are used to examine recruitment of students to university business programs. These concepts are applied in the context of a Collegiate DECA chapter on campus, which is presented as a method of facilitating progress of high school students through the stages of predisposition to attend college, search for information, and choice of institution of higher education. A survey of 84 high school students who attended events hosted by a Collegiate DECA chapter on a university campus suggests that the collegiate chapter can favorably affect predisposition about higher education, assist with the search process, and improve the students' perception of volitional control in regard to college enrollment. Results regarding choice of a specific institution are positive, but not as strongly positive as the other findings.

I. INTRODUCTION

Directors of university and college business programs are concerned with simultaneously building relationships with business partners and increasing student enrollment in their programs. The programs that are promoted are more appealing to business partners if there is a large selection of qualified students, from whom they can recruit. At the same time, students are more interested in the program if there are many impressive companies recruiting. Of these two challenges, the former requires more continuing effort. The pool of business partners (recruiting companies) is cumulative and can be built over the years. Students, however, graduate, so the director of a business program is constantly starting over with student recruitment. Consequently, a business program needs to create a pipeline of potential students to replace those graduating.

The target market for student recruits for a business program includes several segments. First, current freshmen and sophomore non-business students at the

university may be convinced to become business majors. Second, local community colleges are a logical source of potential students, particularly those who have completed business courses. Third, graduates returning to college for a business degree are an additional segment. Fourth, high school students are an important group to target. This study focuses on that segment and examines the use of a Collegiate DECA chapter for recruiting high school students to the business program at a west coast public university (WSU VANCOUVER).

In order to recruit high school students, they must be convinced to pursue higher education, to qualify, and to enroll at the particular institution. In order to effectively consider these processes, recent research has integrated the College Choice Model (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987) with theories and principles from consumer behavior, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (Pimentel, Pitre, and Burgy, 2013; Pitre, Johnson, and Pitre, 2005; Ajzen, 1991).

II. THE COLLEGE CHOICE MODEL

The College Choice Model (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987) includes three stages that individuals go through before enrolling in college: predisposition, search, and choice.

During the predisposition stage, aspirations and academic achievement in high school have been assumed to contribute to a predisposition to pursue higher education. Social influences, schemata, and the perception of volitional control are consumer behavior concepts that apply to this stage of the College Choice Model. These are particularly relevant in regard to potential first-generation college students. For them, the schema for adult life does not include a college education, and it may not be considered to be important within the family or other primary reference groups. The lack of a precedent within the family may also cause the potential first-generation students to believe that higher education is out of reach for them, i.e., not within their volitional control. They are not likely to be aware of available programs for students that need financial assistance (McCallister, Evans, and Illich, 2010) and even for students with mediocre academic performance in high school (AVID, 2012).

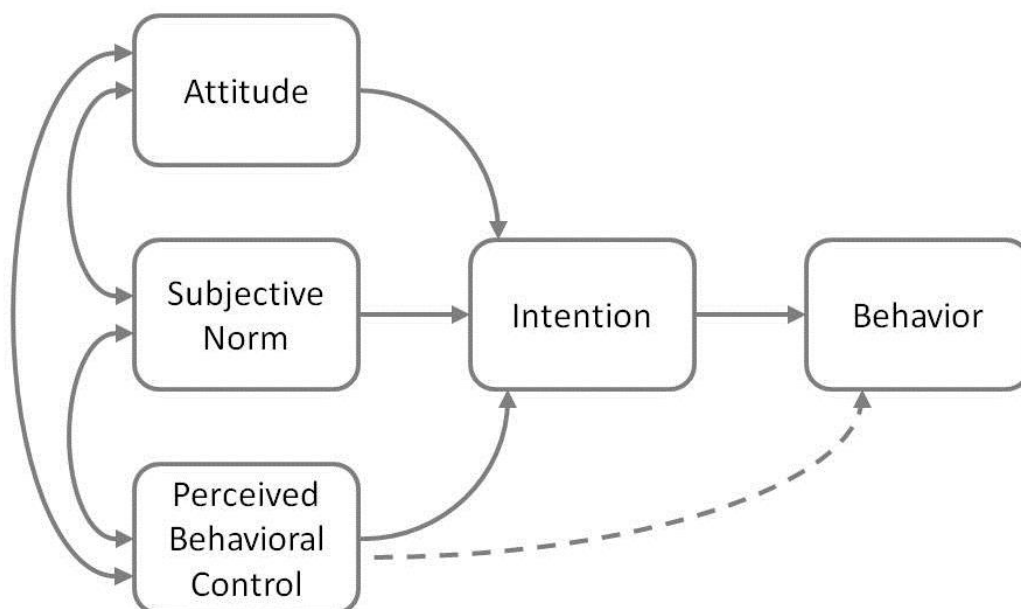
During the search stage of the College Choice Model, potential students seek the necessary information to be able to decide about higher education, where to apply, and how to do it. For potential first-generation students whose life situation has not provided them with a schema, they also lack the necessary scripts for obtaining information about higher education, for the application process, and for financial aid. Consequently, they may be less motivated to complete the search stage of the process, particularly if they believe that higher education is beyond their reach due to cost or academic performance.

During the choice stage, potential students narrow their set of school options in order to make a decision. Clearly, for an institution to be the choice of a particular student, the individual must be predisposed to attend college, and must have been able to get the necessary information about the particular college or university. Beyond that, the institution should have some sort of perceived differential advantage to remain in the consideration set and ultimately become the choice of the student.

III. THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) dovetails well with the College Choice Model (Pimentel, Pitre, and Burgy, 2013) and further informs the recruiting of students. It is formulated as follows:

FIGURE 1. THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR



(from Ajzen, 2006)

Previous models have used student aspirations and academic performance as predictors of college enrollment. Pitre, Johnson, and Pitre (2005) improved upon previous models by using behavioral intentions as predictors of the behavior of pursuing higher education. Behavioral intention works well as a variable when examining the predisposition stage of the College Choice Model. As the model indicates, the behavioral intention to attend college depends, in part, on the individual's attitude about doing so, which is determined by the strength and valence of various beliefs about attending college. The intention to attend college is also affected by subjective norms: social pressures, the strengths of various normative beliefs, and the individual's motivation to comply with these norms. Finally, the

behavioral intention is influenced by the perceived volitional control, which is important in both the predisposition stage and the search stage of the College Choice Model.

The College Choice Model has been used for such studies as Pitre's (2006) examination of ethnically based differences in students' aspirations regarding higher education. Bergerson (2009) also applied the College Choice Model to diverse student populations and concluded that the model is strengthened if it is combined with additional concepts, such as "habitus, capital, and cultural wealth." Pitre, Johnson, and Pitre (2005) also found an opportunity to improve upon the College Choice Model by including consumer behavior principles by combining the model with the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980) to better understand the predisposition stage of the model. They show how the behavioral intention variable from the Theory of Reasoned Action is a superior measure of predisposition for the College Choice Model. The theory identifies attitudes and subjective norms as determinants of behavioral intentions. In other words, the predisposition of a student to enroll in college is explained, in part, by that individual's attitude about college attendance plus the attitudes of the student's reference groups of family, friends, etc. Pimentel, Pitre, and Burgy (2013) expanded on the work of Pitre, Johnson, and Pitre (2005) by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to the College Choice Model. The Theory of Planned Behavior is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action that added the variable of perceived behavioral control, i.e., the individual's sense of volitional control for a behavior. This was an important addition because it accounts for situations where a student is otherwise predisposed toward college attendance but for some reason, believes that it is out of reach.

The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior have been applied to a wide variety of situations such as consumer intentions to drink alcohol (Ajzen and Sheikh, 2013; Schlegel, Crawford, and Sanborn, 1977), eat fast food (Ajzen and Sheikh, 2013; Brinberg and Durand, 1983), use birth control pills (McCarty, 1981; Davidson and Jaccard, 1979; Werner and Middlestadt, 1979), vote in a presidential election (Ajzen, Timko, and White, 1982; Jaccard, Knox, and Brinberg, 1979; Fishbein and Coombs, 1974), donate blood (Bagozzi, 1981; Zuckerman and Reis, 1978; Pomazal and Jaccard, 1976; Warshaw, Calantone, and Joyce, 1986) and purchase specific brands of products (Ryan, 1982, 1978, 1974; Warshaw, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980; Bonfield, 1974; Lutz, 1973).

The College Choice Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior can be used prescriptively for recruiting students to a business program. Some of the prescribed efforts can be accomplished with the use of a Collegiate DECA chapter at the institution.

IV. COLLEGIATE DECA

DECA is a natural choice for gaining access to achievement-oriented high school students who are interested in business careers because it has a high school division and a college division. Students who enjoy DECA in high school may wish to continue with it in college. To facilitate the transition, DECA has established DECA College Connection, a system for connecting former high school DECA members on college campuses (DECA Website, 2013).

According to its mission statement, “DECA prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe.” It was founded in 1946 and has involved more than 10 million students, educators, school administrators and business professionals. It has gained brand recognition as an outstanding experience for future leaders and entrepreneurs (DECA Fact Sheet, 2012).

The high school division of DECA is enormous with 185,000 members in 5,000 schools. The collegiate division (formerly known as Delta Epsilon Chi) is much smaller, with 15,000 members in 200 colleges and universities (DECA 2012). Since Collegiate DECA chapters exist on relatively few campuses, it can be a differentiating factor for an institution recruiting students.

DECA activities seem to revolve around annual major events: a conference in the fall and competitions in the spring. For the competitions, high school students participate at an area-level competition, a state-level competition, and an international-level competition. At these events they meet business professionals from many leading companies, who serve as judges for the competitions. DECA’s National Advisory Board includes 72 corporate business partners; many of them are represented at the conferences and competitions (DECA, 2013). In many cases, there are thousands of students in attendance. These are exciting, motivating events. Students with fond memories of these events like the idea of continuing them in college. Collegiate DECA members compete in a statewide competition and an international competition.

As a faculty advisor of a Collegiate DECA chapter, I have been allowed to help with high school DECA events and to promote our university, DECA chapter, and business program. I have had the opportunity of hosting visits to campus by prospective students who gained an interest in the campus through meeting me at the DECA events.

Having a Collegiate DECA chapter has also enabled WSU VANCOUVER to host events for local DECA chapters on our campus. The students who attend become

familiar with the campus and associate WSU VANCOUVER with positive experiences with DECA.

V. APPLICATION: THE RECRUITING OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Having a Collegiate DECA chapter on campus is helpful for many aspects of recruiting students, as outlined from cited models and concepts. Examples are given in the context of the College Choice Model below, with references to concepts from the Theory of Planned Behavior.

1. PREDISPOSITION STAGE

In regard to the predisposition stage, involvement with DECA is helpful for identifying those high school students who already are predisposed to study business in college. Among high school DECA members, 90% express the intention of continuing their study of business or becoming entrepreneurs, and 86% of them report A or B grade point averages (DECA 2012), so they are more likely to qualify for admission.

For students who are not already predisposed to enroll in collegiate business programs, DECA can help to facilitate the desired behavioral intention. Hosting DECA events on a university campus can be helpful in this regard. An annual event for high school DECA chapters at WSU VANCOUVER features a panel discussion where high school students ask questions of the Collegiate DECA student officers. The officers share their experiences about higher education and about our specific programs. The ideas that they share help the attending high school students to develop a more positive attitude toward the behavior of attending college in general, and at the WSU VANCOUVER campus in particular. The panel also addresses positive outcomes, emphasizing opportunities for networking with business professionals and thus greatly improving employment prospects. For those students who do not have a schema that includes higher education, the WSU VANCOUVER DECA officers act as a quasi- aspiration group and role models because they are impressive and “cool.” Also, I use the panel to facilitate perceived behavioral control, by assuring that one of the questions that the panel answers is, “How are you paying for your college education?” The officers relate their strategies, which include financial aid and working while attending school. Consequently, it is possible to address each of the variables that affect behavioral intentions according to the Model of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The predisposition of students may further be influenced by experiences that they have while participating in DECA activities. The business professionals whom

they meet there may influence high school students to continue with college education to effectively prepare themselves for successful careers.

2. SEARCH STAGE

DECA events are a good opportunity to share relevant information with high school students who are in the search stage of the College Choice Model. These are mostly students who have decided to pursue higher education but are still gathering information to help inform the decision of where to attend. I am able to distribute packets of information to students at the high school DECA events and especially at the events that WSU VANCOUVER hosts on our campus. During those events, high school students are again able to ask questions of the WSU VANCOUVER Collegiate DECA officers. They also go on a campus tour that shows them the important locations on campus for advising, financial aid, and admissions. The tours are conducted by student ambassadors who serve as further role models and information sources. All this helps the high school students to develop a script for gaining admission to WSU VANCOUVER.

WSU VANCOUVER has been able to persuade some high-potential high school DECA members to visit the campus on an individual basis. This is an ideal scenario because I can meet with them personally plus arrange for them to meet with advisors, financial aid, and admissions. I can also arrange to have them sit in on one of our business classes.

Officers from the local high school DECA chapters are also invited to help run the WSU VANCOUVER annual campus sales competition. These students have a great experience on the campus and are exposed to the WSU VANCOUVER business program. Any sort of visit to campus helps the university to seem more familiar and less intimidating.

The business program at WSU VANCOUVER also connects with potential students through social media. High school students can follow the WSU VANCOUVER Collegiate DECA chapter on Facebook and on Twitter.

Essentially, the intent is for potential students to emerge from the search stage with WSU VANCOUVER as part of their consideration set. They should have the information that they need to determine that they can accomplish their educational goals with the WSU VANCOUVER business program.

3. CHOICE STAGE

In the Choice Stage, the potential students have collected information about WSU VANCOUVER and its programs as well as about other institutions. At this point, WSU VANCOUVER needs to have a differential advantage. Having a Collegiate DECA chapter on campus may be an appealing selling point to students who have realized the benefit of their participation in high school DECA. This is expected to be particularly true for the high school students who have been able to network effectively with business professionals through DECA involvement and realize the value of such networking for career advancement. Assuming that a large percentage of college students pursue college degrees as a means of improving their career potential, opportunities for networking with potential employers may be an important choice criterion.

For some potential students, the relatively small enrollment of the campus may also appear as an asset. By visiting the campus and meeting with advisors, they will be able to see that they will not be lost among a huge student body.

A distinct asset of WSU VANCOUVER is that it is a beautiful campus, built on a hill among evergreen groves, with commanding views of landmark mountains. It is a pristine campus, devoid of litter and graffiti. The grounds are well kept, and the buildings are well maintained. If WSU VANCOUVER can get potential students on campus, it can capitalize on this advantage. DECA helps to get them on campus.

VI. EMPIRICAL STUDY

A literature search was sufficient to convince me to create a Collegiate DECA chapter on the WSU VANCOUVER campus three years ago. Three years is not enough time to collect longitudinal data to test the effectiveness of the effort. I did, however, conduct surveys to measure attitudes and intentions of high school students at the DECA University Day events in 2012 and 2013. Each event was attended by groups of students from three local high schools. One high school brought students to the event on both years, four others attended one year each. The students who completed the survey were members of DECA, members of a marketing class, or both. A total of 84 surveys were completed. The surveys were completed near the end of the event. The survey instrument is included as an appendix.

The first six questions of the survey concerned the students' levels of satisfaction with the different aspects of the event that they were attending. The next seven questions were Likert-scale items that are relevant for this study. They are presented here, along with the distribution of the responses for each.

The first two of these questions are appropriate for the predisposition stage of the College Choice Model. They address the concern of students who may lack schemata and scripts for higher education. The idea was to help them develop these things such that the campus becomes less intimidating to them and their intention and predisposition to pursue higher education is enhanced. The results were encouraging.

Figure 2. Responses from question 7, “Attending this event made me feel more comfortable about being on a university campus.”

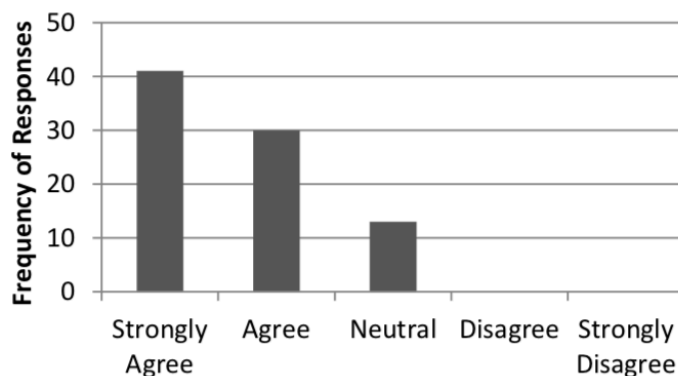
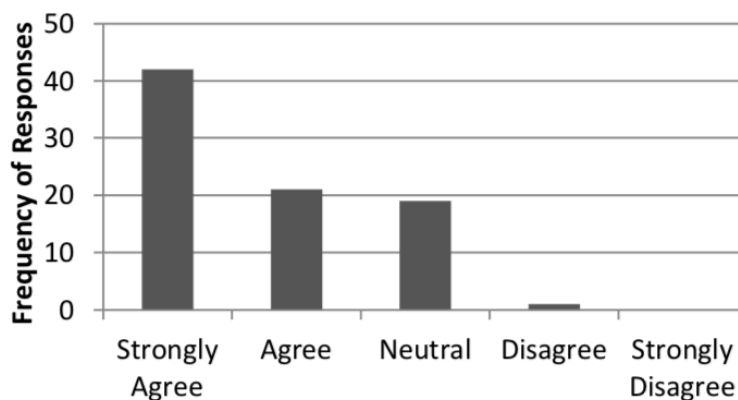


Figure 3. Responses from question 8, “Attending this event made it more likely that I will go to college.”



Two other questions concerned the search stage of the model. As a university and a business program trying to build awareness, WSU VANCOUVER is interested in knowing what high school students know about it.

Figure 4. Responses from question 12, “Before attending this event, I knew that WSU VANCOUVER had a Collegiate DECA chapter.”

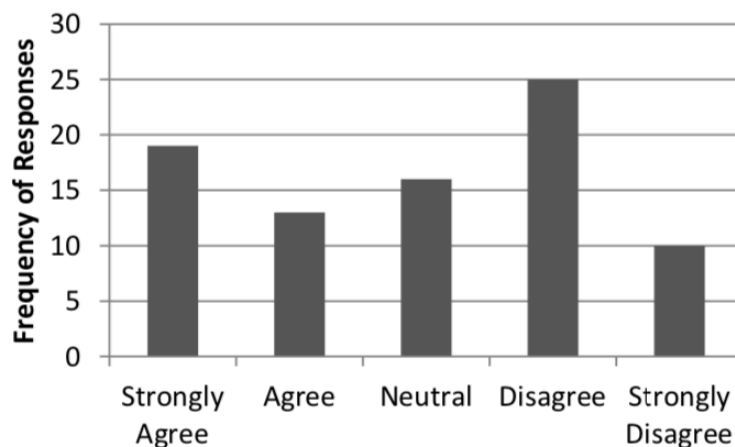
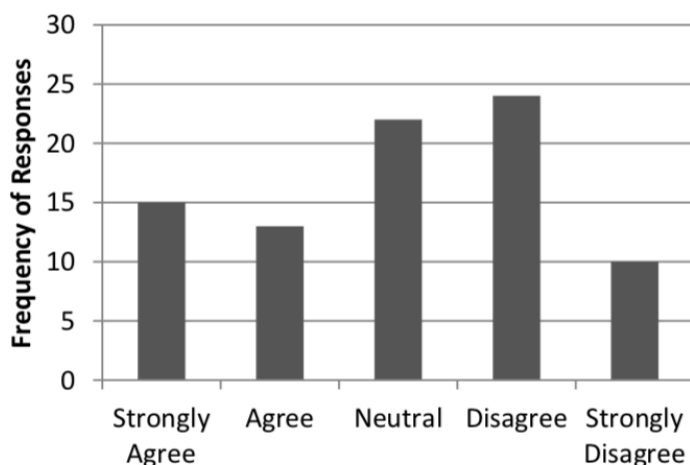


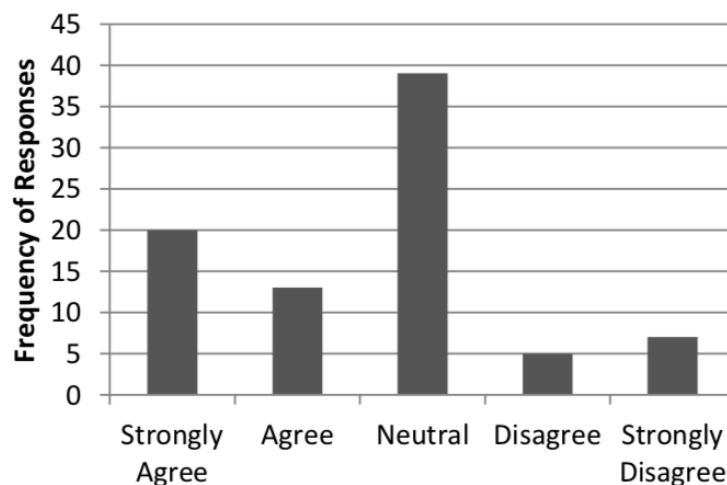
Figure 5. Responses from question 13, “Before attending this event, I knew that WSU VANCOUVER had a Professional Sales Program.”



This question asks about the WSU VANCOUVER professional sales program instead of the business program as a whole, because the sales program is promoted specifically at the event, and this data is being used to plan future events. Though WSU VANCOUVER might have wished for higher levels of awareness prior to the event, this is an example of how it is able to provide information for the search stage through DECA.

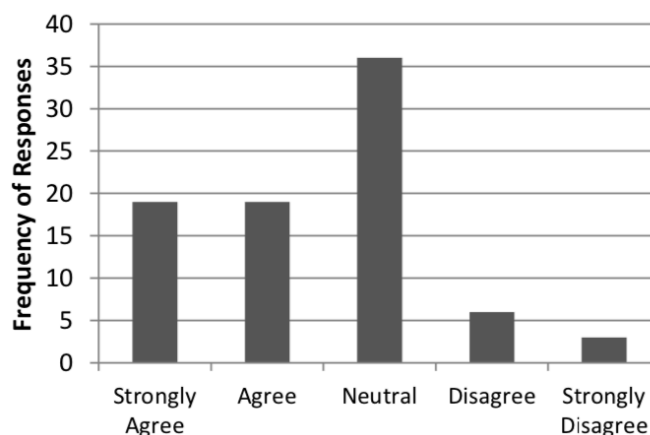
The remaining three questions are about behavioral intentions that are related to the choice stage of the College Choice Model.

Figure 6. Responses from question 9, “Attending this event made it more likely that I will apply for admission to WSU VANCOUVER.”



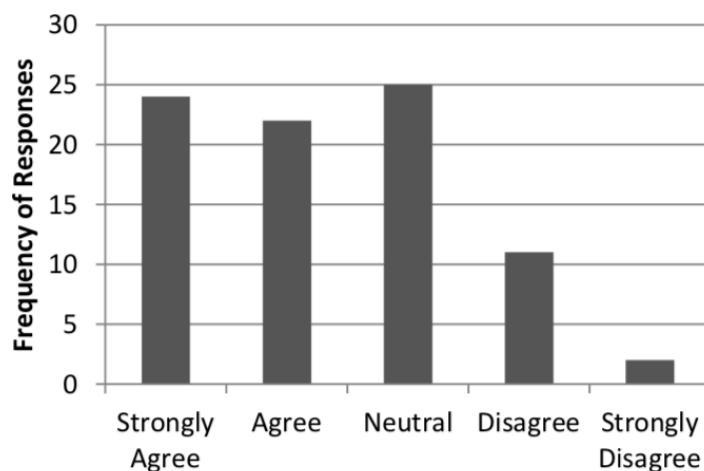
These results are somewhat less impressive than some of the others. They need to be considered in context. Realistically, I did not expect to convert everyone in attendance to WSU VANCOUVER. Also, it is important to remember that behavioral intentions for a specific institution are made in the choice stage of the College Choice Model. Many of the students at the event were not expected to be at that stage. One third of them were freshmen in high school and more than one quarter of them were seniors that may have already committed to a college or university. It would have been helpful to have data about where the students planned to attend college. The data only concerns the influence of the event on the choice. Some may be planning to attend but had already decided prior to the event and, thus, were not influenced by the event itself.

Figure 7. Responses from question 10, “Attending this event made me more interested in participating in the Professional Sales Program at WSU VANCOUVER.”



As more of the students work through the search stage and into the choice stage of the process, they will come to realize that not many colleges and universities have recognized sales programs. WSU VANCOUVER has the only one within commuting distance of these students' homes. Consequently, an interest in a sales program may direct some of these students to WSU VANCOUVER.

Figure 8. Responses from question 11, "I am interested in participating in Collegiate DECA while I am in college, it might affect where I attend."



As with the sales program, WSU VANCOUVER has the only Collegiate DECA chapter within commuting distance of the homes of the student respondents to the survey.

VII. DISCUSSION

The data presented gives encouragement that a Collegiate DECA chapter can be helpful for recruiting high school students to a business program at a college or university. It targets a good segment of prospects and provides an opportunity to influence them in each of the stages of the College Choice model.

There are a large number of organizations for collegiate business students that may be established on a campus. Most of these provide great extra-curricular experiences for the students. Many of them provide opportunities for networking with business professionals. It is more likely, however, that the student organization can be used to recruit high school students if the organization also includes high schools. DECA is not the only organization that meets that qualification. Another is FBLA/PBL. It is Future Business Leaders of America for high school and middle school students and Phi Beta Lambda for college students. It also has a professional division. Including all the levels of student members and professional members, the membership exceeds that of the DECA high school and college student members.

FBLA/PBL holds conferences and competitions, as DECA does. PBL would be a good student organization for colleges and universities that want to attract business students from high school.

Establishing the student chapter of Collegiate DECA or PBL does not ensure that high school students will be attracted. Club officers and advisors must actively pursue involvement with the associated high school-level organizations. I have found it effective to offer my services as a judge at the high school DECA competitions, and to present workshops to them. I have also had success with inviting high school DECA chapters to the WSU VANCOUVER campus for a program designed specifically for them that includes a competition, a tour of campus, a panel discussion featuring the Collegiate DECA officers, and pizza.

The study was clearly limited by the data available. Due to the ordinal nature of the data, the small sample size, and the lack of a control group, it was not possible to test hypotheses with statistical significance. Instead, the contribution of this paper is for application in business programs in higher education.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Thank you for attending the second annual DECA University Day. We are interested in your feedback about the event. You are not obligated to answer any of the questions, but we appreciate any answers that you are willing to give.

For each of the following, please indicate how much you liked it.

	Liked very much	Liked	Neutral	Disliked	Disliked very much
1. Opening comments/presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Competitive advertising exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Discussion panel of DECA Officers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Lunch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Location and facilities used for the event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Event overall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. Attending this event made me feel more comfortable about being on a university campus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Attending this event made it more likely that I will go to college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Attending this event made it more likely that I will apply for admission to WSU VANCOUVER	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Attending this event made me more interested in participating in the Professional Sales Program at WSU VANCOUVER	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I am interested in participating in Collegiate DECA while I am in college, it might affect where I attend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Before attending this event, I knew that WSU VANCOUVER had a Collegiate DECA chapter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Before attending this event, I knew that WSU VANCOUVER had a Professional Sales Program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Any comments?					

When you have completed this survey, give it and the DECA University Day Interest Card to one of the WSU VANCOUVER volunteers to enter a drawing for a WSU VANCOUVER DECA t-shirt.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!