ABSTRACT

The use of social networking and its potential in connecting students with their chosen profession is unlimited. As educators we must also assist in making these connections. It is in the best interest of any program to ascertain what students are doing to be successful post-graduation and to assist them in preparing for this time in their lives. Overall, study data shows students understand the significance of networking, however they do not understand the importance of taking part in networking activities to foster this connection to the industry. The perceived value of networking, whereas clearly understood by students, did not translate well into practice. We as educators first must realize that our students of the Millennium and Generation Z students are progressing through the four semesters of the program and as minors. There are 233 students enrolled as BHA majors or minors within the program currently. A random subsample (n = 204) was drawn from the larger sample for inclusion in the study. Of this subsample, 194 (95.09%) were eligible to be included in the study. Eligibility was determined via submission of a completed versus less-than-completed survey.

METHODS

This research was conducted under an approved IRB exemption via a survey instrument which was specifically designed for this study. Students included in the networking study were chosen by their degree classification. Students are grouped into semesters and as minors. There are 233 students enrolled as BHA majors or minors within the program currently. A random subsample (n = 204) was drawn from the larger sample for inclusion in the study. Of this subsample, 194 (95.09%) were eligible to be included in the study. Eligibility was determined via submission of a completed versus less-than-completed survey.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

We must consider the current generation of students who are graduating, and the fact that social networking has been a part of their world for most of their lives. If we consider history, LinkedIn launched in 2003, Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006, and this interest needs to be translated into using this same technology to drive their own careers. Students showed a very low participation in LinkedIn as in the below chart. The peak was during semester three, where active participation is part of a class requirement, with a marked decrease after that point.

PERCEIVED STUDENT IMPORTANCE

Data was also considered assessing the types of networking that was available to students. This data was assessed not only by type, but also by classification by minor status or semester in the program. Both networking with industry professionals and with other students were found to be of significant importance to students. However, when looking deeper into the knowledge of venues for networking, the perceived importance across all areas was scant. Overall, the data shows students understand the significance of networking, however they do not understand the importance of taking part in networking activities to foster this connection to the industry.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Students reported a 95.1% rate of taking part in some sort of personal social networking (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, or some other site). Student interest is there, this interest needs to be translated into using this same technology to drive their own careers. Students showed a very low participation in LinkedIn as in the below chart. The peak was during semester three, where active participation is part of a class requirement, with a marked decrease after that point.

OF NETWORKING

A pleasing conclusion which was drawn from the data is that students appeared to have a much more significant understanding of the significance of the value of networking as they neared graduation. However, the perceived value of networking, whereas clearly understood by students, did not translate well into practice.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study was to identify and analyze perceptions and factors surrounding the student use of social networking as a tool to increase their professional presence in the field.

PERCEIVED STUDENT VALUE

Perceptions were also assessed of students on networking (in general) before their entering the program versus the time they became a health administration (HA) major or minor. The data did show a significant boost in importance (9% increase overall) for those who were majors/minors, shown in the figure below. This was applicable for perception of all three assessed levels (value of networking at any level, with other students, and with industry professionals).

CONCLUSIONS

There is a critical importance to the personal networking model that people in the healthcare industry have used for years, and this importance translates into social media in networking today and in the future. As their professors and mentors, we have the opportunity to embrace this future of networking and zealously promote it on behalf of our programs but, more importantly, on behalf of our students so that they get the necessary advantage over others that would not otherwise be available through conventional means.