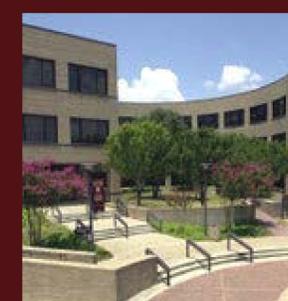


Perceptions of the Value of Professional Networking by Undergraduate Students in a School of Health Administration: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

The use of social networking and its potential in connecting students with their chosen profession is unlimited. We as educators must also assist students 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 arrive into our classrooms with more extensive social online networking exposure of casual nature and yet, without context or knowledge of professional and interpersonal networking. Providing context, direction, and assistance is where educators can help bridge this gap.

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, Pinterest in 2010, along with the myriad of other social networking vehicles which existed alongside them. To put this into perspective, current graduates were twelve years old when LinkedIn was launched. Their world really has never existed without these kinds of technologies at their fingertips. Access has simply become easier, with the advent of smart phones, and internet access on the fly. Understanding how significant a piece of life the smartphone is for these young adults allows us to reason why it would allow for an opportunity for them when it comes to future employment. Furthermore it has become an apparent need to explicitly embed employability tools and methods into an educational curriculum and help students to develop those skills to meet them. As educators we can work with students to this end.



The data collected as a part of this research was collected as a pilot study to ascertain student perceptions regarding the importance of networking on their chosen career in healthcare administration with their BHA degree. This study examined students as they are progressing through the four semesters of the program and with minors in the program as well. The program is only offered by admission to junior and senior level students who undergo a rigorous admissions process. The aim of this study was to ascertain how the program could do a better job in preparation of students in this important part of their future success.

OBJECTIVE

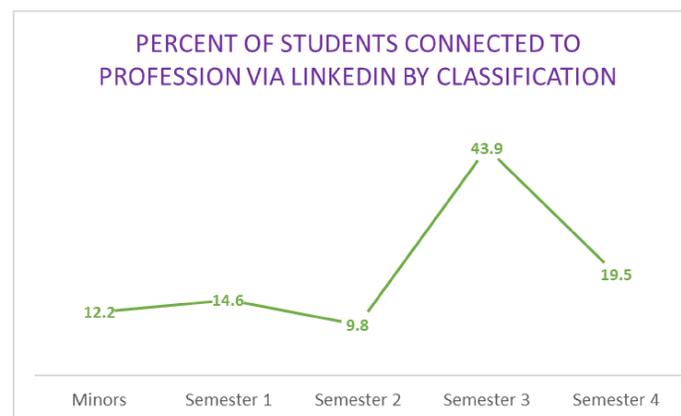
The objective of this study was to identify and analyze perceptions and factors surrounding the student use of social networking as a tool to increase their professional presence in the field.

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.

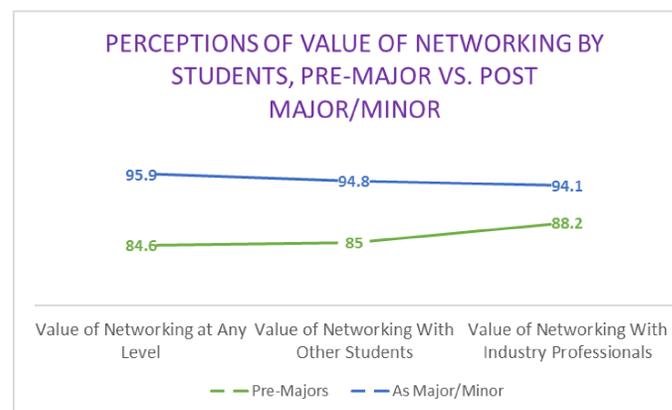
STUDENT PARTICIPATION

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.



PERCEIVED STUDENT VALUE

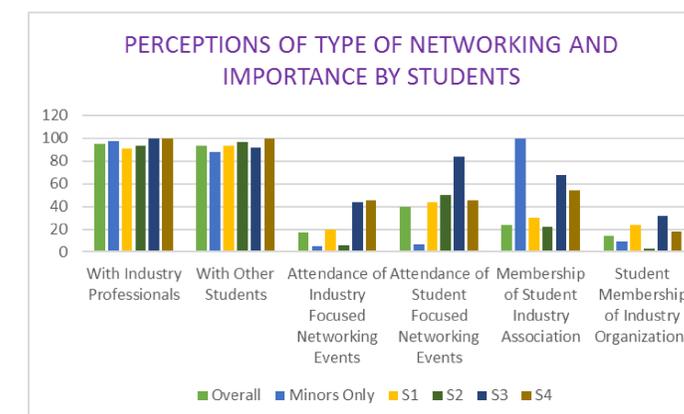
Perceptions were also assessed of students on networking (in general) before their entering the program versus the time they became a health administration (HA) major or minor. The data did show a significant boost in importance (9% increase overall) for those who were majors/minors, shown in the figure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



This manuscript is currently under review at the Journal of Health Administration Education

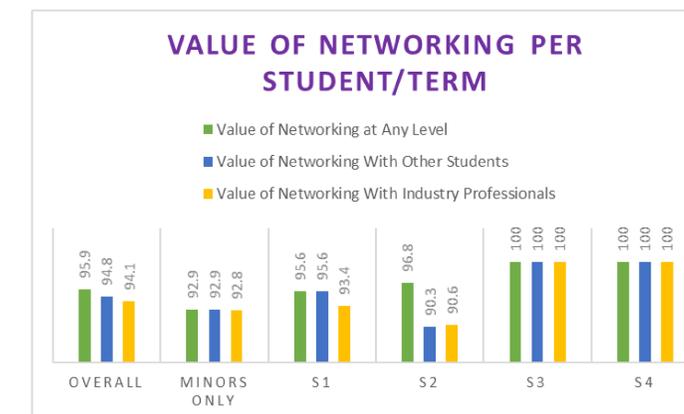
PERCEIVED STUDENT IMPORTANCE

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.



OVERALL VALUE 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.



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.