

Get Strategic About Campus Recruiting

A consistent campus presence builds employer brand

By Amy Gulati
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Organizations have long understood the benefits of recruiting on college and university campuses as a way to attract the best and the brightest. Historically, employers developed relationships with schools as a way to source niche talent or fill a general pipeline of interns and entry-level hires.

A recent report from Bersin by Deloitte asserts additional benefits of strategic campus recruiting, including dissemination of the employment brand and talent gap management.

"Campus recruiting programs provide a continuous opportunity for organizations to promote their employment brand messages and showcase their cultures and leadership," said Robin Erickson, Ph.D., co-author of Bersin's study and vice president of talent acquisition research for Bersin by Deloitte. "But companies also need to understand that a successful campus recruiting program will require a different approach to talent acquisition. Besides the obvious differences in logistics, an effective campus recruiting program also requires a strong relationship with the colleges and universities involved," she said.

Erickson emphasized the importance of building a partnership with the academic institutions, a sentiment echoed by Jeff Kudisch, Ph.D., managing director of the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith Office of Career Services.

Kudisch pointed out the need to have a consistent campus presence wherein a company invests and builds awareness, even if it does not currently have any openings to fill. Just as filling the talent acquisition pipeline with experienced hires is a continuous effort, effective campus recruiting programs recognize the value of community involvement and employer branding in landing top recruits either for immediate or future hire.

Kudisch also emphasized the value of getting input directly from educators. "Professors know better than anyone how students compare to their peers" and how well they can apply sought-after skills, he explained. In selecting a college for a campus recruiting presence, Kudisch recommended targeting those institutions where career services partners closely with academia. Some employers go one step further and may even sponsor teaching fellows or new academic programs. For companies experiencing a shortage of critical skills, an agreement with a local college or university to develop relevant degree programs might be a viable long-term investment in closing the skills gap.

When allocating resources and creating a strategic plan for college recruiting, it is critical to keep the unique needs of your audience in mind. Companies that plan to heavily recruit at the college level would be wise to adapt their careers website and application process in support of these efforts.

Mir Ali, vice president for global technology solutions with Futurestep, a Korn Ferry company, suggested the creation of a separate application and landing page for college applicants to ensure that they are not screened out by experience requirements and to ensure a customized candidate experience. Ali recommended employers assess their careers website to ensure that it appeals to target demographics. "If you want to recruit young technical talent, your careers site should mirror the employer image you want to project," he said. All career sites should also be mobile-enabled or mobile-compatible. Lastly, you should ensure that the content showcased on your corporate careers page is relevant to college audiences.

According to results of a February 2015 study conducted by Futurestep (www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/staffingmanagement/Articles/pages/matters-most-millennials.aspx), the ability to make an impact, the career development opportunities available and the alignment of company values all matter more to Millennial employees than compensation. In order to appeal to the new generation of college recruits, your corporate careers page must reflect their values.

If your organization is looking to develop or re-energize your campus recruiting program, keep in mind that HR does not have to bear the sole responsibility for execution. The Bersin report pointed out that alumni involvement can both ease the logistical burden on HR and increase candidate engagement. High-performing alumni can be engaged to represent the company at career fairs and to conduct on-campus interviews as ambassadors for their employer. Alumni involvement is also a good way to ensure that campus recruiting efforts are sustainable and integrated with overall business objectives, two key elements of any successful program.

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