

Using Extracurricular Activities to Boost Your School's Enrollment

By Brent Baldwin

One way to increase the number of students attending your school is through the effective use of extracurricular activities.

Recruitment concerns Adventist educators from the elementary to higher education levels. Enrollment numbers are the lifeblood of an institution's growth, a necessity for continual development of staff, technology, and facilities. In many cases, the school's budget is held hostage to the dictates of a particular year's enrollment.

One way to increase the number of students attending your school is through the effective use of extracurricular activities. Putting it simply: *Students recruit students*. But what is the most effective approach?

Although academics, caring staff, location, campus amenities, and spiritual tone all play important roles, one of the best enticements for prospective students is extracurricular activities. Whether or not prospective students are actively involved in the specific activity, they will see the best a school has to offer. There are many options: sports, drama, music, ministry teams, etc.

The most crucial element of extracurricular activities is the involvement of school employees. These activities require a lot of time and commitment on the part of faculty and administration, but they offer rich rewards in return for the effort expended in prepara-

tion, travel, and supervision. The value to the institution is immeasurable. Extracurricular activities can foster enduring relationships between staff and students, promote good will within the community, and help recruit potential students.

However, extracurricular activities must be presented in ways that enhance recruitment. Let's examine a wide spectrum of activities to see how each can contribute to recruitment.

Music

Music has always been an effective method of recruitment. Due to its broad appeal and plethora of styles, music touches everyone. Prospective students who are involved in music want to participate in programs that are not only fun, but also push them to achieve their best. One of the best things about a music program is the impression it gives to students, parents, and constituents of academic accomplishment.

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Musical groups can play an effective role in recruitment.

One caution: Be sure to investigate your audiences and the music they are likely to enjoy. A different selection of songs will be appropriate for a youth vespers than for a Sabbath morning service for elderly parishioners.

A traveling music program can be very appealing to potential students. I know of several academies that raise money for a yearly choir or band trip overseas. These big events impress prospective students and contribute to school prestige. However, they are quite costly. Small music groups can help keep costs down and still give musicians an opportunity to excel. Many academies have outstanding choral and instrumental groups that are a credit to their school.

At the college level, small musical groups work best, in terms of exposure and costs. For instance, La Sierra University (Riverside, California) has the Octet, Union College (Lincoln, Nebraska) has a traveling brass band, and Southwestern Adventist University (Keene, Texas) has The Company.

Drama

Another extracurricular activity that helps boost recruitment is Christian drama. This is a great way for your students to get involved in local communities and churches. When I was in charge of

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drama at Sandia View Junior Academy in Coralles, New Mexico, we made presentations at nine different churches in one year. Before we went to a church, I asked the local pastor to advertise our performance and invite all the prospective students in the area to meet with me and the drama students for a potluck dinner at the church. Our schedule included a Friday night performance and several skits at church on Sabbath morning. We stayed in church members' homes to maximize our exposure in

the community. In several instances, we stayed through Saturday night for church social events.

Sports and Athletics

Another extracurricular activity that helps boost recruitment is athletics and sports. This is a controversial issue within our church, but if done correctly, it can have a positive effect on enrollment and school spirit.

However, if your athletics program involves merely playing games, you are missing not only a huge recruitment opportunity, but also an opportunity to develop Christian values. When I was the men's basketball coach at Southwestern Adventist University, I enforced certain policies to enhance recruitment and general public

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relations for the school. Before we traveled, I contacted local churches in the area to announce the games. As a result, on many nights, we had a great cheering section.

When we had away games on Saturday nights, we traveled on Friday. That evening, the team would present vespers, or if the local church had a vespers, we would attend. On Sabbath, I would require three of my players to speak for church. Every player was required to speak during at least one church service. The players also helped with song service, prayer, offering call, etc. I helped them prepare by suggesting resources and people who could assist them.

The benefits of having young athletes involved in the church service, where prospective students could see them up front talking about Christ, were invaluable. We always attended potluck dinner after church, which gave us the opportunity to meet with members and prospective students.

Gymnastics offers more possibilities for recruitment than varsity athletic teams, since these groups can perform at all local feeder schools and churches. This extracurricular activity can involve prospective students in learning a variety of skills through clinic-type settings. The great thing about this approach is that your students have marvelous opportunities to create relationships with prospective students.

Ministry Teams

Ministry teams are an effective method of recruitment. Team members don't even have to talk about your institution! A multi-talented group that gives testimonies, sings, speaks, performs skits, and leads young people in outreach activities can be the best extracurricular form of recruitment. Having a group that can get up in front and say they

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Traveling gymnastics and sports teams, like the two groups shown above from Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas, can be an effective way to boost enrollment.

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Having school groups perform at a variety of churches gives recruiters an opportunity to talk with potential students.

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Ministry teams are an effective method of recruitment and can have a positive influence on the campus as well.

love Jesus and also “hang out” with prospective students after their performance is “practicing what you preach.” This kind of group will also raise the spiritual level on your campus, which in turn helps attract prospective students.

There are many other extracurricular ways of recruiting students, such as conducting reading programs and having stu-

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dents do volunteer work in feeder schools. Keep in mind three basic principles when choosing an extracurricular activity in order to ensure that it is an effective recruiting tool:

1. Announce and promote school

groups visiting an area.

2. Involve prospective pupils with your students.

3. Be approachable and spend time with prospective students.

Successful recruitment requires a combination of the components listed above with other aspects of excellence. By using the ideas in this article and others in the issue, you should be able to achieve both increased enrollment and good public relations for your school. ✍

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