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From Barista to CEO

Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

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Tuesday November 8, 2016

By Eric Spina

When you're the CEO of a \$1.2 million corporation, it's not unusual to rise at the crack of dawn.

I recently enjoyed an early breakfast with Flyer Enterprises CEO Erica Roux and her executive team. A senior finance and operations major from St. Louis, Erica never dreamed she'd be the CEO of a company at the age of 21.

What college student wouldn't want to showcase that eye-opening experience on her resume? I know I would have jumped at that opportunity.

The University of Dayton is one of the few places in the country where in just a couple of years you can work your way up to CEO from the unlikeliest of beginnings — barista in a basement coffee shop in the campus library.

We have all frequented Flyer Enterprises' businesses on campus, maybe not even knowing it. I ate lunch at the hip ArtStreet Café during a visit to campus last spring. When I recently visited the faculty and staff in the School of Business Administration, we catered the reception from The Blend Express.

But until I sat down with these sharp, ambitious students over breakfast sandwiches and wraps, I didn't fully realize the transformative experience they were gaining as they juggled a full load of classes. They could write the book on experiential learning. Just consider some of the numbers:

- Flyer Enterprises is the fourth largest student-run business *in the country* and the fourth largest student employer on campus.

- The company employs 190 students from all majors in positions ranging from sales associates to buyers to community outreach coordinators.
- Its nine divisions span catering, retail, culinary and furniture storage.
- It has generated \$15.5 million in revenue through 26 years, with \$30,000 donated to charity.
- It boasts a 95 percent post-graduation placement success rate.
- Flyer Enterprise's 591 engaged alumni work for some of the most successful companies in the world — from Apple to GE.

As I listened to these amazing undergraduates talk about their scope of authority, the special initiatives they are pursuing in their departments and how they worked their way up in the company — from a cashier at Flyer Spirit to the c-level suite — I realized the true value of this program. It breeds confidence, a can-do spirit and passion in students who, I know, are destined to lead in the world with the values and integrity gained in a holistic Marianist education.

Flyer Enterprises is their training ground. This is their company.

And I can't imagine it being in better hands.