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Building Buzz

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11.22.2011 | Students, Culture and Society, Hot Topics

In an "American Idol" twist, high school seniors are being invited to create videos on what servant-leadership means to them and compete for a total of \$50,000 in scholarships through a Facebook contest.

The deadline is Dec. 15, but prospective students can enter the contest until Feb. 1 if the video is not part of their official application.

It's both a nod to the way the YouTube generation communicates — and a novel opportunity for prospective students to stand out from thousands of other applicants. Students can submit either a standard written essay, this video or both. It's the first time the University of Dayton has accepted a video essay in lieu of a written one as part of the application process for first-year students.

Entrants will share their videos through Facebook, Twitter, email or word of mouth to drum up votes. The 10 videos with the most votes will be reviewed by a team of University faculty, students and staff who will select the winners. The grand-prize winner will receive a \$40,000 scholarship over four years; the runner-up wins a one-year \$6,000 award, and the third-place winner gets a one-year \$4,000 scholarship. Voting begins Feb. 1.

"This is a way for prospective students to promote themselves to us by portraying themselves in the most creative way possible," said Kevin Schultz, assistant director of University marketing and digital innovation. "A handful of schools are now accepting videos as part of their applications, but we're not aware of any others running social media contests that prompt students to reflect on an issue so central to the school's mission."

For the University of Dayton, it's ultimately about enrolling students who will excel inside and outside the classroom. "This contest helps prospective students understand the University of Dayton is a Catholic, Marianist school, and we're serious about servant-leadership. It's one of the tenets of what makes the University of Dayton special," Schultz said.

The University of Dayton is promoting the contest primarily through Facebook, Twitter and a QR code marketing campaign. Promotional posters and University of Dayton T-shirts have been mailed to 280 public and private high schools around the country. Students have used smart phones to scan the QR code on the T-shirts more often than the posters to find out more about the contest, according to Schultz.

The social media video contest is part of a number of cutting-edge strategies the University of Dayton is undertaking to

creatively market itself to high school students across the nation. The University has rolled out what's believed to be the first iPad viewbook — a multimedia version of the traditional print brochure that fills mailboxes of high school juniors and seniors. Earlier this fall, the University received national attention for offering prospective students four years of free textbooks for making an official campus visit, applying, submitting a federal financial aid application and receiving their acceptance letter, all by March 1.

The marketing initiatives are paying off. The University has received 8,471 applications for next fall's first-year class — a 30 percent increase over last year at this time — and is on pace to break the record.

This is the second year the University of Dayton has offered a social media video competition. The inaugural "Your Question. Your Mark." competition invited prospective students to create a video to answer the question: "If you could search for the answer to one question before you begin college, what would it be?" It drew 36 entries from eight states, and more than 13,000 votes were cast.

The grand-prize winner, Amanda Morel, now a first-year education major, explored the question, "What factors promote long-term retention in the American high school's mathematics classroom?"

For more information, contact Kevin Schultz at 937-229-4412.