

# A business of his own: HPU Entrepreneurship

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“[My favorite part is the] freedom. I don’t like having a boss,” said A.J. Rodriguez of his new business endeavor. “Technically, I do right now just because of the internship, but he’s not really there to tell me what to do and he doesn’t put my schedule together or anything like that. It’s completely me. I have ten employees right now and they’re all under me and it’s my control.”

AJ Rodriguez is a sophomore at High Point University majoring in business administration with a concentration in entrepreneurship and minoring in Spanish and finance. During the last six years, Rodriguez’s parents have been franchise owners of six Sports Clips Haircuts locations in the Pittsburgh area and will be opening two more locations in the next year. He has been so inspired by his parents entrepreneurial spirits and all that he has learned working with them during the past six years that he has begun the process of starting his own business through an internship with Young Entrepreneurs Across America.

“The biggest thing I hope to gain is the knowledge of how to run a business. That’s what I want to do in the future, that’s what my major is, and that’s what my parents do. I didn’t want to have their company handed to me; I didn’t want to be that person. I wanted to operate a company without their help and show that I can do it and that I can earn it,” said Rodriguez.

Young Entrepreneurs Across America (YEAA) has a 21-year history of teaching students how to run a business through real world experience and mentoring. Student Painters is a real business created by YEAA so that their interns can have hands-on managerial experience. Currently, Student Painters is in 19 states and employs thousands of students in managerial and staff positions.

When asked to explain the YEAA program, Rodriguez said, “[YEAA] is actually an internship, so what they do is help me to start a business and they teach me all the respective parts of running a business including sales, interviewing, hiring, estimating houses for painting projects, talking to customers, and payroll. Everything you can think of. What [YEAA] does is they front most of the cost involved with it. So if you need money to buy a pressure washer or ladder, they pay for it if you do not have enough capital to do so. They take a percentage out of the profit and what’s left is yours to keep.

Young Entrepreneurs Across America has been coming to HPU for the past four years to recruit qualified students for the program. This year, Kent Johansson, a freshman who will be running his business in Thomasville, N.C., was recruited along with Rodriguez. Cameron McGraw, a senior and vice president of HPU’s Entrepreneurial Club, practiced in the same program two years ago. Charles Apter also interned with YEAA and is now Rodriguez’s mentor. During the history of YEAA recruiting at HPU, many students have successfully gone through the program and gained first-hand knowledge of the difficulties and benefits of running their own business.

“The most difficult thing I’ve found is getting the 20 percent deposit. When we make a sale, getting 20 percent of [the total cost] upfront is very difficult. The way we charge is 20 percent down and 80 percent after the final walk around with the customer,” said Rodriguez.

Despite this difficulty, he is enjoying his experience as a business owner and has big plans for the company.

“My company started as soon as my business plan was completed. I was hired in November, so I finished my business plan over Winter Break. I was done with it in December. I started the hiring process immediately,” said Rodriguez. “I’ve already had \$11,900 in sales in the last couple of weeks. My goal is to end up with a \$40,000 business by the end of the summer.”

Through the YEAA internship program, many HPU students, including A.J. Rodriguez, have gotten the opportunity to step into the world of entrepreneurs and fulfill the HPU philosophy of experiential learning.



A.J. Rodriguez, sophomore, will run a division of Student Painters this summer through Young Entrepreneurs Across America. Photo by Caroline Durkee