

FIRST Team 3337 – Chairman’s Award Essay - 2014

With more than 2,200 hours of outreach, 700+ social media fans, seven FLL teams, four FRC Teams, and one dedicated family of Panthrobots, *FIRST* Team 3337 is infiltrating our community with a passion for science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics. As the original FRC team in our area, we have used every tool in our arsenal to inspire government officials, business executives, curious parents, wide-eyed children, and countless others. Our mission is clear; we are creating a culture that defines the innovator as a leader in our world.

When students become members of our team, they quickly learn the value of diversity. With over five different nationalities and a 50/50 gender ratio, our team is focused on making every member a part of our family. From the start, our members are busy accomplishing our mission. This year, within two months of joining our team, two of our rookies presented at the Louisiana Science Teachers Association Convention. Veteran members have been referees at both state and local FLL events, volunteered at off-season FRC competitions, spoken before state and local government officials, and have even organized outreaches themselves. Members have been part of Autism Outreach Camps, become Eagle Scouts, and this year, one of our seniors was chosen as a finalist for our district’s Student of the Year Award.

For many, being a successful student at Woodlawn is a challenge. 66 percent of students from Woodlawn are from a minority group and 68 percent are currently on free or reduced lunch. According to statistics, half of our student body will score below an 18 on their ACT, only sixty-six percent of students are expected to graduate from high school and less than half of those will attend college or its equivalency. While these numbers may be disheartening, Panthrobotics is working to reverse this trend. Every student on our team has received their diploma. The average ACT score of a Panthrobotics student is 26.3, over 38 percent above the state and national average. Eighty-eight percent of our graduates have entered into college or military service, sixty-six percent have entered into a STEAM based program and unlike the national average of 38 percent, every one of our minority members have entered into an engineering or science program.

Even after graduating, our members continue to impress. Graduates who entered the military were accepted to the Navy’s most demanding departments: the Nuclear Science Program and the Advanced Computing Program. Our college bound alumni have been admitted to programs at Louisiana Tech, Louisiana State University and others. Every student who has entered into these programs has maintained above a 3.5 GPA, and 25 percent of them have been asked to participate in internships at ExxonMobil, Excel, and Introlox. 86 percent of our alumni have continued working with other *FIRST* teams, and two of our alumni are responsible for working with the LSU STEP Program to recruit and to train mentors for *FIRST* Robotics teams throughout the area. This program has grown to include over 25 mentors in 5 schools.



Our team does not only impact members and alumni, it also impacts our mentors. Over the last five years, we have seen our mentors grow by 80 percent with an average growth rate of 25 percent each year. Participation with our team has provided our mentors opportunities and accolades above the norm. Our teacher mentors have received a number of accolades, such as our team founder being chosen as a 2013-2014 Einstein Fellow with the National Science Foundation, and our team coach being recognized as the district Teacher of the Year for 2014 as well as being invited to the 2013 *FIRST* Air-Force Leadership Experience. Our college mentors have been placed in coveted internships with companies such as Centerpoint Energy and ExxonMobil, and 100 percent of our college mentors have found lucrative careers with companies such as Cimation, Rockwell Collins, and California Creative Solutions after graduation.

Changing a community is an arduous task and can only be accomplished by sustained efforts through outreach. Over the last five years, we have recorded over 2,200 hours of student and mentor outreach to the community around us. To help us further organize our outreach programs, we have developed four initiatives.

Our Government Outreach Initiative has reached officials in both local and state government such as our mayor, Kip Holden, and our state's agricultural commissioner, Mike Strain. We have had one-on-one discussions with our local superintendent, Dr. Bernard Taylor, and state superintendent, John White and were even able to present to the highest board of education in our state. These efforts have gone beyond simple demonstrations. We have helped, in partnership with a local foundation, to raise 600,000 dollars which has been used to implement STEAM programs in 5 middle schools and 3 high schools. This foundation continues to use programs such as the Red Stick Rumble and our FLL qualifiers to improve its fundraising efforts.

Our Business Outreach Initiative has allowed us access to both private corporations and business associations. This initiative includes our work with both sponsors as well as organizations that represent many businesses across our area. By speaking before groups such as the Louisiana Engineering Society, the Baton Rouge chapter of the International Society of Automators, and the Louisiana Technology Council, we have been able to recruit sponsors for our team, raise approximately 10,000 dollars for BLAST, our local *FIRST* organization, and introduce hundreds of participating companies to *FIRST*.

Through our Community Outreach Initiative, we are working to change our culture through involvement in our school, the media, and community events. In the past five years, we have worked to increase recognition by our school community through hosting open-house demonstrations, lunch demonstrations, car-smashes and t-shirt sales. This year, we are hosting our first ever Robo-Rally, a school-wide pep rally where we will introduce our school to our 2014 robot. This increased exposure has helped maintain our team growth and this year we have added thirteen rookies; a fifty percent increase in new recruits since last year.

We are also increasing our public visibility beyond the walls of our school. From 2011 till 2014, we have appeared in news segments on three local television affiliates and in every major local publication. These have included both live and pre-recorded events both at our school, build-site, and in studio as well as multi-page newspaper reports and magazine articles. According to numbers provided by ratings gathered from each agency, we have been seen by well over one million people through the media. We are also participating in



community events throughout our area, being seen by thousands at both local community events such as the Baton Rouge Fest-For-All and business events held for our sponsors such as the JCPenney Grand Reopening. We also use multiple forms of communication to reach members of our community. In less than two years we have grown our Social Media following by 400% and currently have active Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages to maintain community awareness.

A large part of our Community Outreach Initiative includes reaching children in both elementary and middle school. Our yearly Impact Tour has allowed us to bring the vision of *FIRST* to thousands of elementary school children. This year we were able to visit five schools in one day, bringing our robot to amaze one thousand first through fifth graders. Many of the schools we visit are high-poverty schools, and many of the students have never had the opportunity to learn how they could be part of a robotics team.

To further our outreach to local middle and elementary schools we have also continued our Panthrobotics Ambassador Program. Through this program, elementary and middle school students are able to join our team. Our Ambassadors work through the build season to learn skills they can take back to their schools or robotics clubs. Our middle school ambassador has been with us since fourth grade and has become as well versed in *FIRST* Robotics as any of our high school members. Our two new elementary ambassadors are both part of a local FLL team and are using this experience to recruit members for their team.

Another major goal of our team is to inspire other FRC teams. Through our Panthrobotics Inspire Initiative we inspire other teams to push for greatness and to see success in all areas of their growth. This year, we organized the Red Stick Rumble, the first off-season FRC event in Louisiana. Twenty-one FRC teams from four states attended. This event did more than provide an extra chance for teams to play. Because it was held after the start of the school year, teams were given the opportunity to train new members, attract new participants, and experiment with new designs for their team. We also hosted our first FLL Qualifier at our school and were later able to watch many of the FLL teams that participated compete at the Louisiana Regional Championship where we volunteered as judges, referees, and time-keepers.

Over the last five years, Panthrobotics has continued to create change within our community. By founding and mentoring FRC and FLL Teams, our Ambassador Program, and our Inspire Initiative, we are creating a continued pipeline of student leaders excited about *FIRST* in their community. Through our three Impact Initiatives we are reaching state and local government, business contacts, and community supporters. We are watching the lives of students of all ages be transformed through our demonstrations and Impact Tours. As we continue to live *FIRST* in everything we do, we know that our mission is not impossible. We will create a community of inventors, designers, builders, and innovators ready to change our world.

