

PUGET SOUND CONSORTIUM FOR MANUFACTURING EXCELLENCE Interview with the Director of the Highline Community College SCORE Program ¹

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BACKGROUND

The Puget Sound Consortium for Manufacturing Excellence (CME) works with local educational partners to promote manufacturing career opportunities to students. In particular, the CME is developing recruitment and retention strategies to encourage a diverse workforce. Of particular interest is the recruitment of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds who are presently underrepresented in manufacturing careers. The Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) was contracted by the CME to gather information about the Highline Community College Students of Color Opting to Reach Excellence (SCORE) program designed to recruit diverse students. The information obtained will be used for recruitment and retention program development.

METHODS

On February 6, 2003 and March 25, 2003 an OEA evaluator interviewed the director of the SCORE program at Highline Community College. The interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. The first interview occurred three weeks before the SCORE program had taken place, and the second interview was three weeks after the program occurred.

During the first interview, the following questions were asked: 1) What does the SCORE program entail?; 2) What is working?; 3) What have been some pitfalls?; 4) What recommendations would you have for someone developing a similar program? For the second interview, similar questions were asked: 5) What worked well?; 6) What did not work well?; 7) What recommendations do you have?

Responses were recorded in hand-written notes. The notes were analyzed inductively and substantive categories were developed. Rather than presenting the findings for each question, the results of the analysis are presented in four categories: SCORE program description, what worked well, what did not work well, and director recommendations.

RESULTS

SCORE Program Description

The SCORE program is a one-day conference for junior and senior high school students of color. It is designed to be an opportunity for students of color to explore post-secondary educational opportunities, discuss relevant issues they may face as people of color, and it provides students with a network of community contacts for future reference. The program was marketed to recruit students not presently in leadership tracks and who are not already college bound. It is intended to be an opportunity for students

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to visit the Highline Community College campus, gain exposure to a variety of educational programs and careers, and gain information about “hot” jobs and the education necessary to obtain those jobs. Sixty-one students from four Highline Community College area high schools attended the program.

When implemented on February 28, 2003 the SCORE program began with a welcome speech. The welcome was followed by an energetic performance (e.g., step performance and slam poetry) intended to “hype-up” the students and put them at ease in the college environment. The high school students were then randomly assigned to small groups of 8-10 students led by current Highline Community College students. In the small groups, the Highline student leader facilitated a team building activity, led a discussion about the high school students’ personal educational challenges and goals, and shared the story of their own path to college.

Once students became acquainted within the small groups, they attended two panel presentations. The first panel, Voices of Success, consisted of current Highline Community College students of color. These students were selected to represent a variety of paths to and through college to increase high school students’ ability to connect their own experiences with those of a successful role model. The panelists varied in age and in their program of study. These students shared personal stories of their college paths; followed by a question and answer period. The second panel, Make it Happen, included two career counselors. The counselors provided students with detailed information about planning for the future (e.g., preparing for college, attending college, selecting a career).

Students were provided with a boxed-lunch. During the lunch break, the high school students and Highline students participated in an impromptu open-microphone session. Everyone was encouraged to demonstrate their talent (e.g., sing, dance, rap, tell a joke, etc.) to provide entertainment.

After the lunch break, the students individually selected two of seven workshops to attend. The seven workshops were: Applying to and Paying for College; From Two to Four: Differences Between Two- and Four-year Schools; College Athletics: The Myths, the Realities; Critical Moments; Marketing Yourself for Success; Technology Basics; Who am I? Understanding Racial Identity. The workshop sessions were followed by closing remarks, and then students departed for the bus back to their schools.

What Worked Well

With regard to planning the SCORE program, the director indicated that recruiting high school student participants was the greatest challenge. Personal contact with high school career counselors was the best strategy. The SCORE director met face-to-face with career counselors to inform them about the program and leave them with promotional brochures. She also offered to speak at assemblies, classes, student club meetings, and teacher meetings to promote the program. Another logistical element that worked well was the program’s cost. There was no cost to the high schools or the individual students for participating. High school career counselors indicated that any cost, no matter how minimal, would have been prohibitive. Consequently, the SCORE program paid for the students’ transportation and lunch.

Overall, the program exceeded the director’s expectations. The high school students were very enthusiastic and attentive during the program. Randomly dividing students into small groups worked very well. Students were able to interact with students from other schools and learned about experiences other than their own and those of their friends. Interaction with the Highline Community College student

leaders and the Voices of Success panelists was very beneficial. These interactions were very engaging for the students. It gave high school students the opportunity to relate their personal histories and experiences with those of successful college students which can make attending college seem like a more attainable goal.

The director reported that all seven workshops received high ratings on the program evaluation form. However, the most popular/most attended afternoon workshops were College Athletics: The Myths, the Realities and Who am I? Understanding Racial Identity.

Interestingly, the director commented that the highlight of the day was the impromptu open-microphone session. The entertainment kept the students active or attentive during the 45-minute lunch period. The director felt that a 45-minute lunch break without an activity would be too long, leaving the students idle, and potentially bored and restless.

What Did Not Work Well

As indicated above, recruitment of participants was the greatest challenge. Although planning for this event began in June 2002, participant recruitment could have been improved by occurring earlier. The promotional brochures were not ready until three weeks before the event, and thus, recruitment was late. The brochures were delayed because they contained the program schedule which had to be revised to coincide with the high school students' schedule. Consequently, program planning should have taken the participants' school schedule into account at the very beginning, and not after the day's events had been planned, scheduled, and printed on the brochures. The director was very pleased that 61 students attended, but the program could have accommodated 150 students and it was initially hoped that 100 students would participate. Being able to recruit earlier may have increased attendance.

The Make it Happen panel did not work as well as desired. This panel presentation included a lot of lecture material, and the students appeared bored. It may have worked better if the information was presented in a more interactive manner with a more motivational message.

Although the afternoon workshops were well attended, it appeared that students did not have enough information to make very informed workshop selections. It may have worked better to have more descriptive information provided for each workshop, and more active marketing of these sessions.

Director Recommendations

The director made several recommendations to improve the SCORE program and other similar programs based on general observations and reflections. First, given that this was the first year for the SCORE program, the director felt it was difficult to get schools interested and committed to participating because the program did not have an established reputation. Once high quality was assured at no cost, schools were very receptive to the program.

Second, the director suggested that high school principals be involved in student recruitment. Career counselors are the best resource for front-line contact with students. However, contacting both high school career counselors and their school principal increases the career counselor's accountability to follow through with promised recruitment activities. Furthermore, recruitment efforts need to explicitly

state that program activities pertain to the target minority populations while expressing that students from dominant groups are welcome. It should be noted, however, that dominant group students' information needs might not be met given the goals of the program.

A third recommendation pertains to logistical factors. More signs could have been posted on campus to direct the students' movement throughout the day. The director observed that high school students are accustomed to adults regulating their movement, and in the absence of these the controls, the students needed more signs indicating where they needed to be throughout the day. Students only required 5 minutes to move about campus to attend the next activity.

Finally, the high school students seemed very interested in the college cafeteria. Rather than providing a boxed-lunch, the director determined that future programs permit the students to order their lunch, as typical college students do, through the cafeteria. In addition to making the high school students' "college experience" more realistic, the director recommends this as a cost-savings strategy. For example, in the future, SCORE participants will be issued a \$5.00 voucher for the cafeteria. The program is only charged for the number of vouchers remitted rather than for a pre-ordered number of boxed-lunches that are wasted if fewer than expected students arrive on the day of the program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the director of the SCORE program at Highline Community College was very pleased with how well the program was attended and delivered. Successful program elements included: no participation fees, face-to-face contact with high school career counselors when recruiting participants, small group activities, interaction with Highline college students during the program, and the open-microphone lunch session. To improve this program, and other similar programs, recruitment activities should start earlier such as several months before the event, recruitment efforts should include school principals to improve accountability for recruitment follow-through, program scheduling needs to consider the restrictions of students' daily schedules, ample signage should be posted to better direct students' on-campus movement, information should be imparted by interactive methods as opposed to lecture formats, lunch breaks should be short (i.e., less than 45 minutes) or include an engaging activity, and lunch should be provided in a way that is more consistent with typical "college life."

Interestingly, some of these findings converge with those reported in, Puget Sound Consortium for Manufacturing Excellence: Student Field Trip Survey (Balanko & Collins, 2003). For instance, students that attended the field trip to Renton Technical College really enjoyed interacting with Renton college students and engaging in interactive hands-on activities, but they expressed some dissatisfaction with the boxed-lunch. Notably, the evaluator also observed that students attending the Renton field trip were very interested in the college cafeteria and its fast-food outlets. Consequently, when planning future recruitment activities these factors should be given careful consideration as they seem to be important to students across contexts.