

Partnerships With High Schools: Partners In Our Future

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The University of Cincinnati—Clermont, located twenty-two miles east of downtown Cincinnati in rural Clermont County, was facing a decline in enrollments during the 1998–99 academic year when the national and local economies competed with education. As the unemployment rates fell, so did enrollments. In order to reverse the downward movement in enrollments and revenues, the college embarked upon Project 2000. The program relied upon a cross-section of both staff and faculty (professors and adjuncts) with an interest in working on a plan that would improve enrollments by identifying three to seven things our organization could do that would best utilize our strengths and meet Project 2000's goals. A great deal of time was invested in getting to know the team members' strengths and allowing each member ample time to contribute knowledge and expertise. This large initial investment led to a great deal of member participation and commitment. Team members had ownership and so were highly motivated.

Getting To Know The Customer

Project 2000 decided to get to know our customers better by identifying them and dividing our customer market into segments. We named the largest two segments Traditional (meaning high school graduates who proceed immediately to college) and Workforce Development (meaning career-minded employees who desire to improve their skills and their chances of advancement on the job). We developed surveys designed to discover what our customers want and need from us. We learned that our customers need help with getting adequate information while they made career decisions and plans. They need assistance with career planning and how to decide among the alternative methods of acquiring the knowledge and skills to be able to perform well within their careers.

Among the organizations we surveyed was the campus' Education

Advisory Committee, made up of members of the Clermont County schools. The local school leaders voiced their desire for Clermont College to have a stronger presence within the school halls and classrooms so that students could get acquainted with college professors and attain a better understanding of the benefits of attending college. I agreed to do it.

There are many benefits to partnerships between colleges and schools. Let's first examine how partners benefit and then how partners practice.

Beneficial Partnerships

Collegiate readiness will improve. In Maryland, the Education Secretary, Nancy Grasmick, the Higher Education Secretary Patricia Florestano, and the University of Maryland Chancellor Donald Langenberg lead the Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning (PTL) which seeks to enhance the number of college-ready high school graduates. The Maryland Partnership formed many subcommittees, one of which focused on remedial education and was charged with the task of finding out why, from the perspective of the student, they were not college ready and in need of developmental work. Most students placed responsibility on themselves. In one group, students admitted that they "did not take high school seriously and that they purposely did not take challenging courses." Three-quarters of the students indicated that their major reason for going to high school was to socialize. Most said they took the I-don't-care attitude during the sophomore year. About half said they lacked motivation and did not think they would go to college. Professors who participate in partnerships with local schools are able to establish relationships with potential college students and communicate the importance of learning skills while in high school, the transferability of these skills to college and the workplace, and the value of continuing their education at the college level.

Students' economic futures will improve. Students benefit from partnerships when professors influence high school graduates to attain a college education that will allow their future economic health. The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education asserts that "graduates of community colleges with a two-year associate degree earn almost \$12,000 more per year than high school graduates." This is quite a

healthy return on investment when one considers the projected tuition for the next two fiscal years (2000 and 2001) is \$6,039. If one were to qualify for the Hope Education Tax Credit of \$1,500 for two years, the investment is reduced \$3,000. College graduates' salaries are not the only employment statistics that are high. College graduates' employment rates are much improved as the level of education is increased. Civilian workers with some college and an associate degree have a 2.9% unemployment rate, while college graduates with bachelor's degrees have a 1.6% unemployment rate, considerably lower than the rate experienced by those with no college and those with no high school diploma.

High school and college curricula will improve when educators communicate. As relationship building occurs among college professors and high school teachers, the educators can communicate their expectations regarding learning objectives and skills needed to function at the next level. The Maryland Partnership's first three goals are to: 1) better understand and address issues of student preparation; 2) strengthen relationships between faculty and counseling staff at schools and the college; and 3) examine and better articulate curricula.

Colleges can increase their effectiveness. If the mission is to provide student learning and members of the organization are committed to the mission, colleges can provide more learning opportunities to more students and meet their enrollment goals by participating as partners in education with the schools.

Ways To Participate As A Partner

Now that we have looked at many of the advantages of partnerships in education, let's identify ways we can partner with schools in interesting and exciting ways.

Do something you like. I thought I would focus on two subjects I enjoy: careers and finance. I decided to capitalize on two trends in the present economy: the hot job market and the rising stock market.

Career Planning. I volunteered to lead a half-day workshop in February of 2000 for Upward Bound students, a group of high school students who are first generation college hopefuls. That month, the national unemployment rate reached a record low 4.0%, and I decided on the subject of career planning and titled the discussion: "Be Who

You Are.” The Upward Bound group met at Clermont College, where we discussed why both career and financial planning are important. Together we pondered the question why they may need to be independent financially within about four years. In an informal survey, the students overwhelmingly agreed that they desired to move away from home and would need to earn an adequate income to do so. We discussed what it costs to live, assuming an average home, car, etc. We worked out some financial estimates of average payments on homes and cars. They seemed surprised to find out how expensive the average home and lifestyle are.

Career Satisfaction. After discussing the annual income needs connected with an average lifestyle, we considered career satisfaction as a major contributor to the quality of life. Students were given a written personality test to determine personality types and suggest possible careers they may enjoy. The students first self-scored a paper and pencil version, and then we went to the computer lab on campus to take another test on the computer. Students enjoyed the computer-based test located at the Department of the Interior website. In an area called “Career Manager,” there was a seventy-question test that automatically scored itself. This test resulted in one of sixteen possible personality types with corresponding descriptions of the personality types and names of prominent people with similar personality types. Next, the students were offered suggestions for careers likely to match their own personality types. Finally, we completed the circle by exploring the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services website (www.obes.org) to help the student discover whether they can “Be Who You Are” and earn a salary that’s adequate to meet their financial needs.

Do something you know well. The other subject I enjoy is financial planning and investments. The stock market was also hot at the time, rising at a rapid rate (in the fourth quarter of 1999). This topic was one I also knew quite well since I had fourteen years experience teaching Personal Investment Planning at the U.C. College of Evening and Continuing Education.

The Stock Market Game. I proposed to Batavia High School that we participate in the Stock Market Game in the fall of 1999, and the curriculum director recommended the principal select an appropriate teacher. The College Prep. Economics teacher decided to enroll two

economics classes with forty-four students and formed them into eight teams. I met with the economics classes each Thursday in order to coach them on reading the stock quotes, defining stock lingo, and picking stocks based upon news that may have a positive effect on stocks prices. One team managed to parlay its original \$100,000 investment into a portfolio of stocks worth \$214,000 in six weeks. Its stocks increased in value \$114,000 (or 114%). In the final week of The Game, a student survey revealed that the majority felt that they increased their understanding of the stock market and learned how to find and process investment information. A few indicated a desire to continue playing similar games found at sites of discount electronic trading brokers. One student e-mails me his e-trade stock picks regularly.

Interesting topics. Interactive tools. Making money was interesting, and using the computer to locate information and help with decision making was highly effective. The Batavia High School students learned how to make money make money. The Upward Bound students learned how to make money and be satisfied. In total, seventy-four students got to know a college professor a little better and now have another friend on the hill at Clermont College.

In the weeks following the Stock Market Game, a Batavia High School senior who got a 96% in the College Prep. Economics class indicated to me that he would be interested in information in some of the scholarships I told students Clermont College had to offer. This "A" student requested applications for admission and financial aid. He has phoned me to confirm he got what he needs. He applied and was accepted. He will attend Clermont College in the fall of 2000 and wants to study finance.

When I first began to partner, I believed something good would come out of it and somehow the students would benefit. I did not anticipate the students' quick response and did not realize that Clermont College, too, can benefit a great deal by attracting outstanding students like the ones who have allowed me the privilege of getting to know and understand them better.

References

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Biography

Gary Lape is an assistant professor of business management and the Co-Op Coordinator for the University of Cincinnati—Clermont. He has also worked as an accounting and budgetary analyst and assistant grants administrator. Lape has appeared on Channels 19 and 12 in a program to increase public awareness of Ohio home buyer financing alternatives such as mortgage credit certificates and Ohio bond money. He holds a MBA in Finance from Miami University—Oxford. He may be reached by e-mail at gary.lape@uc.edu.