Title of Program: Backpack to Briefcase Series

Sponsoring Departments: Senior Council, Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs

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Funding Amount Requested: $3290

Program Dates: Monthly in September, October, November, February, March, April, May

Target Population: Senior students (but open to campus community)

Background and Issue Addressed

Today’s robust student service offerings cover nearly every aspect of the student experience, including resources fitting for students as they transition out of higher education (Komives & Woodard, 2003; Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010). However, while students receive ample opportunities for résumé critiques, mock interviews, and socio-emotional counseling (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008), there are other areas of the transition that are neglected by traditional university offerings. As a result, both employers of recent graduates and the graduates themselves are noting certain critical voids, including dissatisfaction with numerous “soft skills” (Zippert & Eubanks, 2012). This gap indicates that, despite great effort to educate students prior to graduation, institutions are missing an opportunity to impart critical skills to seniors. Senior Year Experience (SYE) programs seek to fill this gap.

The University of Maryland was among the first in the country to adopt a co-curricular senior experience model, centered on the threefold mission of informing, involving, and unifying the senior class. Through this mission, the institution aims to create a positive senior experience, prepare students for post-graduation life, and create an enduring connection between graduates and the university. The “Backpack-to-Briefcase” (B2B) series is a new program which highlights critical life skills for graduating students that are not covered through other avenues at the university.

Program Goals and Objectives

Seeking to prepare graduates for life after graduation, the innovative B2B program is the first in the nation of its kind. The program’s mission is to teach critical “real world” skills to seniors and ease the post-graduation transition and skills gap. The B2B program presents monthly (approximately) sessions on a variety of topics, including:

- “From Broke to Budget I: Managing Your Personal Finances”
- “From Broke to Budget II: Financial Literacy for Savings and Retirement”
- “From Panic to Paycheck: Graduating to a Great Job”
• “From Grocery to Gourmet: Shopping and Cooking for the Culinarily Challenged”
• “From House to High Rise: Navigating the Real Estate Search in Urban Markets”
• “From Bentley’s to Board Room: Professional Culture and Socialization”

Student learning outcomes for each session varies, but are intended to include a combination of practical skills and conceptual knowledge. To this end, the B2B program teaches “real world” life skills to ease the transition from college into independent living and full-time employment.

Enhancing the Student Experience: Assessment and Evaluation

From its inception, the B2B program has been rooted in data-driven decision making. Students’ needs, participant learning outcomes, and young alumni reflections continue to shape the growth of the program. The B2B program was piloted in 2012 using two post-graduation skills events, and subsequent focus groups provided brainstorming for future B2B topics. Feedback from these focus groups supported the skill gaps identified in the literature. However, more surprising were the tangible skills that students wished to gain; from this feedback, topics such as “From Grocery to Gourmet” and “From Broke to Budget” were added to the B2B curriculum.

Assessment of the “Backpack to Briefcase” program includes pre and post-testing of program sessions, as well as subsequent follow-up with student participants who reflected on the impact of the program during and beyond their senior year. Surveys help to explore the impact of “Backpack to Briefcase” program attendance on students’ perception of possessing the critical skills identified above, as well as the influence on students’ sense of preparedness for post-graduation life. Attendees answered questions about content learning, as well as perception of soft skills gained as a result of the program. This process utilized direct and indirect measures of assessment (Hernon & Dugan, 2004) to enhance understanding of the program’s impact.

More indicative of student learning and institution-centered outcomes were interviews conducted with select B2B participants (n = 16) during their senior year and in the year after their graduation. These interviews found that students’ perception of their skills had increased, but additionally, that adopting a student-centered approach to the senior experience had increased students’ affinity to and satisfaction with the institution, as well as desire to engage as a young alumna/us. When asked about the impact that attendance at one or more B2B programs had on their post-graduation success, students acknowledged the skills enhancement that they felt resulted from program attendance, and others stated that program participation improved their confidence and comfort with their transition to life after college.

While the B2B program is in its second year, early assessment has indicated that the program content has enhanced students’ experience and post-graduation transition. Participants have also reported a higher feeling of appreciation for the University. These outcomes support several goals outlined in the University’s strategic plan. Ongoing longitudinal assessment of program participants will help us to better understand the lasting impact of content on students and young alumni.
Allocation of Grant Funds

*Speaker honoraria/equipment/dinner*
- Grocery to Gourmet: $500
- House to High rise: $100
- Broke to Budget II: $300
- Bentley’s to Board room: $100

*Participant incentives*
- Grocery to Gourmet (Cookware sets, Crock pot, Cutting board/knife set): $300
- House to High rise (Easy pack x 3): $150
- Broke to Budget I and II (Diploma frames): $200
- Bentley’s to Board room (Portfolios, accessories): $100
- Subway dinner at 3 events: $240

*Space and equipment rental*
- Stamp Student Union Event Services Space: 5 events x $120; 2 events x $200: $1000
- Stamp Student Union AV Services: 4 events x $75: $300

**Total Program Budget:** $3290

References


Zippert, E. & Eubanks, D. (2012). *Campus assessment working group snapshot of student experiences: Advice to undergraduates from the class of 2010.* Retrieved from [https://irpa.umd.edu/Presentations/2012Adv_Conf_Take_it_from_me.pdf](https://irpa.umd.edu/Presentations/2012Adv_Conf_Take_it_from_me.pdf)