

Exemplar 4: College Awareness Workshop
Power of Family Conference
CSP 740: Practicum, Spring 2013
Standards Addressed: 20, 22, 24, 27

Introduction:

In the beginning of Spring semester 2013, my colleagues and I were asked by our supervisor, Ms. Nicole Pablo, school counselor at Libby Elementary, to complete a final project. In lieu of completing individual projects, we decided to create and facilitate a conference with workshops on topics of interest to parents and family members, which was expressed to the school counselor during parent meetings. Topics included technology, transitioning to middle school and high school, and college and career readiness. I collaborated with another trainee on the topic of college and career readiness and presented two sessions of the same workshop. Our original intent was to present both workshops alternating between English and Spanish. However, we quickly learned that the majority of parents are Spanish-speakers and switched to conducting the workshop in Spanish only.

To prepare for this conference, we worked together in pairs to ensure that topics discussed were not redundant. With guidance and assistance from Ms. Pablo, we created and distributed flyers to advertise the event. During the event, we provided refreshments and childcare for families with young children. In addition, I was also able to obtain materials such as posters and brochures from College Board to facilitate discussions on college and career readiness. These materials were shared with parents so they could use them to discuss college and career with their children at home.

From the career perspective, we worked backwards to discuss different educational paths such as community colleges, technical institutions, four-year universities, and the differences between public and private institutions. We also discussed financial matters such as saving for college, financial aid, and loans. Although college and career seem to be in the distant future, we encouraged parents to speak to their students about future aspirations and become financially prepared for testing fees, tuition fees, as well as any other costs associated with attending postsecondary institutions. I chose this exemplar because the process of developing this conference illustrates the importance of collaboration, family engagement, utilizing resources from different professional organizations, and professional development.

Standard 20: Career Development

- Since many of the parents in attendance had not attended college and may not fully realize the benefit of college attendance, we discussed how obtaining higher education can positively affect students and their families' lives. We emphasized that the most notable effect is increased income in the workforce. With increased income, students will not need to work multiple jobs, which allow additional time to participate in community and family activities. In addition, students who have received post-secondary education and are on a career path can serve as role models. The ripple effects and benefits brought about by increased income caught the parents' attention and allowed us to transition into discussions about post-secondary choices.
- We provided resources to guide parents on how to speak with their students regarding college and career. One of these tools was California Reality Check (www.californiarealitycheck.com), which begins the career exploration process with the lifestyle the student would like to live then identifies the types of careers that can support the desired lifestyle. Another tool introduced to parents is Naviance, which is used by middle and high schools in the district. Naviance is a portal that allows students, parents, and school staff to interact and share information on academic-, college-, and career-related topics. One fun tool on Naviance is the career assessment tool which matches the student's preferences, skills, and personality to career opportunities. Students can use the results to search for post-secondary institutions that provide training in these careers.

Standard 22: Leadership

- Libby Elementary had no school counseling trainees prior to our cohort. In addition, Libby had not held parent conferences of the scale and scope that were developed and implemented by us. When we identified the gaps in services provided to students and families, we took charge of the leadership roles to form this conference. We communicated our needs, such as obtaining permission from school administrators, printing of flyers, making announcements in the school, and providing refreshment and childcare during the conference. With Ms. Pablo helping us with the logistics, other trainees and I were able to focus on gathering information to be disseminated during workshops. This process helped me develop as a leader by relying on my team and delegating tasks so that I could focus on the tasks I needed to complete.
- Though I was not directly in charge of the financial aspects, I learned that there are many considerations in regards to budgeting. For example, we wanted the flyers in the shape of

a paw print since the school's mascot is a tiger. We realized, however, that the additional cost in printing was not a wise use of the funds when there are other concerns such as overtime pay to staff members. In another example, we considered hosting individual workshops on different days to reach parents who have different availability. Again, we realized that the need for additional staff to be available for extended hours would be a financial burden on the school. Witnessing these financial limitations at play helped me realize the many different facets that a school counselor must consider when in a leadership position.

Standard 24: Learning, Achievement, and Instruction

- In accordance with the Universal Design for Learning, we utilized different methods to deliver the information, such as visual graphs, verbal communications, and written words on the slides. We also presented the workshop in the parents' preferred language. Parents were encouraged to ask questions, brainstorm what is already being practiced at home, and additional action items. Hand-outs were available to parents who wanted to review the information at home.
- Forming this conference also helped us learn the best way to communicate and enlist parent support. We have been taught that positive communications with parents can foster buy-in and support. Up to that point, however, I have only been able to practice positive communications through individual parent conferences. Addressing multiple parents and families simultaneously made us more efficient and helped build relationships between families. We hope that parents who were hesitant to raise questions now feel a personal connection to the school and learned that school counselors are available to guide them through their students' academic journey.

Standard 27: Collaboration, Coordination & Team Building

- Throughout the formation of this conference, I had ample opportunities to collaborate and consult with other trainees as well as staff. As trainees, we came together as a group to make decisions about a myriad of topics, such as the format to deliver the information to parents and families, the frequency and the information delivered, and other services we wanted to provide during the conference to attract higher attendance. I believe that we became a more cohesive unit and developed important skills as team members of part of any team.

- Once we had begun a discussion on forming a conference, we realized that we were limited by the amount of time we had at the school and the little knowledge we had in regards to the administrative and logistical needs of the conference. Thankfully, Ms. Pablo was able to serve as a liaison between us and other school staff, such as administrators, nutritional staff, and volunteers. This process taught me that in order for my endeavors to be successful, I must enlist the help of others inside and outside of the school. Including others in the process can also empower them and create a sense of camaraderie.

Conclusion:

When Ms. Pablo first planted the idea of a final project in our minds, we excitedly proposed a conference. We realized that we took on a bigger project than we could manage when we began discussing the details. Fortunately, with the guidance provided by Ms. Pablo and the enthusiastic support from administration, we were able to create a phenomenal conference for our students and families. Administrators have shown interest for a similar conference to be presented by trainees at the site this year, though no plans have been made yet. I am encouraged to hear about the interests shown by administrators and teachers for this conference to be held again. Their interest demonstrates that the conference addressed actual needs and stakeholders believe that the conference was a good method to address these needs.

If given the opportunity to perform more work on this conference, I would have preferred for the workshop on college and career readiness to have less details. We went into great details regarding different types of financial aid and A-G requirements, which may have been too much information and distracted the audience from the long-term focus of college and career. If funding was not a concern, I would also have liked to conduct individual workshops or the entire conference again on other nights so that more families could attend.

Through this experience, I learned that I can depend on my team and others for guidance. As individuals, there is no possible way that this conference could have been made a reality. Together, however, we were able to draw on different strengths and skills to make this event a success. This process also helped me learn that team work can be an enjoyable experience. We shared many fun moments and built camaraderie during the hours we invested into this project. The sense of achievement and success I received was rewarding and refreshing. As a school counselor, I will bring this memory and skills I learned to students I serve. I hope that I can mobilize faculty and staff at my future workplace to create similar conferences!

