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YOUNG ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT IN THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Great-to-Greater Grant Proposal, 2016-2017

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Young Alumni Engagement in the First-Year Experience begins with a series of four meet-up events engaging York College alumni with freshmen students in their first year at YCP. Each meet-up event is then linked to related workshops and information sessions offered by the Career Development Center and the Center for Professional Excellence. Students also have the opportunity to re-connect with the alumni they have met by traveling to their professional workplaces for brief tours and lunch Q&A sessions.

The meet-up events are themed, each one addressing a personal or career development strategy with specially selected alumni who can speak to that theme. Meet-ups presently in development include: "Everything I Know I Learned in My First College Year"; "Making Experience Count: Internships and Volunteering as Career Stepping Stones"; "Hitting the Wall: How Failure Made Me a Success"; "Getting Engaged: How Campus Involvement Shaped My Professional Path."

Each meet-up event is structured as a panel presentation by young alumni (who have graduated in the past ten years), followed by dinner conversations in small groups. This format allows first-year students direct access to the authentic wisdom and advice of successful Spartan graduates. By engaging in friendly, casual discussions with young professionals who have traveled the same educational journey, they will see more clearly their own pathways to success.

To help students translate "inspiration into action," the Career Development Center and the Center for Professional Excellence will offer follow-up workshops on related topics such as using self-assessment tools for strategic career planning, locating and applying to internships, developing a network of professional mentors, and cultivating professional habits early in their college careers. These workshops will help students design and implement their own plan toward academic and personal development.

Students attending a meet-up event can further leverage their connection to the professional Spartans they meet by participating in planned visits to the young alumni's workplaces for brief tours and lunch conversations, accompanied by project staff and, in some cases, First-Year Experience peer mentors (Fellows).

Goals, Objectives, and Rationale

Project Goals

1. Create a powerful combination of networking events with professional role models and practical workshops to increase first-year student motivation, persistence through their freshman experience, commitment to York College for their major course of study, and successful graduation in four years.
2. Create innovative engagement opportunities that allow young alumni to connect with other alumni of their generation through campus mentoring events.
3. Recognize and value young alumni for investing their time and knowledge to nurture a new generation of Spartans who are the embodiment of York College's priorities and its ongoing mission of educational innovation and service.
4. Assist the College in providing students with both credible, real-world perspectives and models of alumni engagement, thereby constructing a "pipeline of support in terms of giving, volunteering, and advocacy," according to Richard Daniel, Rajesh Bellani, and Naomi Marshall, authors of "Students and Alumni: Enhancing Each Others' Experiences."[1]
5. Strengthen and expand the First-Year Experience program through an innovative partnership with the Office of Alumni Relations, Career Development Center, and the Center for Professional Excellence to further enhance first-year student co-curricular learning and engagement.

Relevance to the RFP

This project addresses the Great-to-Greater goal of enhancing community engagement activities through student involvement. This project promotes community engagement by:

- Involving first-year students in active inquiry about college success through structured events with young alumni from the greater York community who can testify to the relevance of a liberal arts education to professional life after college.
- Involving community alumni in mentoring opportunities that connect them to the YCP First-Year Experience program and help new Spartans develop the motivation they need to increase their persistence and success.

[1] AcademicImpressions.com, accessed 1.7.16.

Relevance to the Mission and Strategic Long-Range Plan of York College

This alumni-student engagement series addresses core components of the College's mission, those of emphasizing students' personal development, employing mentoring as a key engagement strategy, and exposing students to real-world experiences.

This project directly addresses two goals of the College's 2016-2021 Strategic Plan:

- Goal 1: "York College will be known for the excellence of our programs, the quality of our faculty, and the distinctiveness of our students' experience."
- Goal 3: "York College graduates will be professionals who are prepared for the competitive global arena and engaged with their alma mater."

Within these goals, this series specifically embodies the spirit and intent of:

- Strategic Objective 1D.1, "Support general education and First-Year Experience (FYE) to include additional learning and student engagement opportunities."
- Strategic Objective 3B.1, "Increase the number of students participating in relevant, professional work experiences, beginning with the alumni network/mentoring."
- Strategic Objective 3D.2: "Develop and implement innovative engagement strategies for alumni" toward the larger aim of increasing "alumni engagement toward a target of 20%."

Methods and Measurable Outcomes

Background Materials and Experiences

According to experts in alumni engagement, honoring young alumni by involving them in creative giving opportunities while introducing students to a professional network that will continue to support and engage them after graduation is "vital to sustaining and growing institutions of higher education."[2]

For too long, institutions of higher education have emphasized charitable giving as the primary engagement path for alumni. As a result, colleges have neglected to "understand the importance of non-monetary roles played by college alumni," according to the journal *Research in Higher Education*. Cultivating "volunteer behaviors," such as mentoring students, allows alumni to support their alma mater "in ways that reflect their historic connections to the campus," which helps fuel their desire to become involved.[3]

[2] AcademicImpressions.com, accessed 1.7.16.

[3] "Beyond Giving: Political Advocacy and Volunteer Behaviors of Public University Alumni," by David J. Weerts, Alberto F. Cabrera, and Thomas Sanford, *Research in Higher Education*, v. 51 (2010): 346-365.

"An effective way to bring alumni into the student experience is to position them as mentors and models," write Daniel, Bellani, and Marshall. Through the natural connections that occur at such events, "alumni are engaged with their institution and students are shown what it means to be an active and engaged alumna/us and a part of the community post-graduation."[4]

As they simultaneously support first-year student success and create new opportunities for alumni engagement, these events cultivate a robust culture of generosity and abundance which nurtures the long-term institutional health of York College. The students "help drive alumni to engage with their alma mater," while the alumni "enrich the students' overall experience." Together "they embody a continuing, reciprocal relationship with the school."[5]

York College has proven success in student-alumni engagement through the Summer Bridge program and the Spartan Nation tours. The First-Year Experience program has engaged students in active inquiry about professional success through its Coffee House series event on small-business entrepreneurship. This Great-to-Greater project will combine proven strategies from those programs into an innovative new format that offers inspirational networking and opportunities to build practical skills and knowledge.

Measurable Outcomes and Methodology

1. Attract an average of 50-75 students per core event, with one-fourth of core attendees participating in a related workshop or a site visit to the professional workplace of an alumnus.
2. Collect qualitative assessment data from students following each meet-up event, workshop and site visit to assess student completion of the following learning outcomes:
    a. List one insight gained about college and/or professional success.
    b. List one specific personal goal for achieving college and/or professional success.
    c. List one specific strategy for achieving the personal goal.
    d. List one campus resource that can assist in implementing the strategy.
3. Collect qualitative assessment data from alumni following each meet-up event and site visit to assess:
    a. Their level of satisfaction with their engagement and how mentoring helps meet their needs as alumni.
    b. How their mentoring experience has affected their intentions for future alumni engagement opportunities.
4. Conduct mid-term and end-of-project reflection meetings involving all campus partners to review the assessment data, the success of the project overall, and formulate any short-term or long-term improvements to increase program effectiveness.

We will work closely with IRB to design reflective feedback and use the data in ways that are consistent with IRB guidelines.

[4] AcademicImpressions.com, accessed 1.7.16.
[5] Ibid.

Addressing Potential Problems

Alumni could drop out of events. This will be managed through planning and securing commitments from panelists one semester in advance of the event. Each alumnus guest will be assisted with developing talking points and understanding the event format so that they feel prepared to engage with students.

Promotional efforts to first-year students could be hampered. To maximize the project's reach to first-year students, we will engage a multi-modal approach through First-Year Experience websites, social media and portal announcements. We will promote the series through peer mentors assigned to first-year seminar courses, distribute posters in academic and residence hall settings, and advertise it through the Center for Teaching and Learning's faculty communication channels.

Requestor and Participants

Project Leader:	Dianne Creagh, Director of First-Year Experience, ccreagh@ycp.edu, x2216
Project Partners:	Nicole Montgomery, Assistant Director, Alumni Relations, nnoll@ycp.edu, x1500
	Beverly Evans, Assistant Dean, Academic Services/Career Development Center, behinger@ycp.edu, x1228
	Matthew Randall, Executive Director, Center for Professional Excellence, mrandall@ycp.edu, x1713
Endorsing Deans:	Debbie Ricker, Dean of Academic Services, dricker@ycp.edu, x1510
	T. J. Arant, Interim Dean of Academic Affairs, tarant@ycp.edu, x1231
	Mary Dolheimer, Assistant Dean of College Advancement, mdolheim@ycp.edu, 1584

Expertise of Participants

- **Dianne Creagh**: First-year student success, student learning through engagement, managing and facilitating engagement events on campus.
- **Nicole Montgomery:** Organizing programs for alumni, informing them of the progress and needs of their alma mater, and developing an active network of recent alumni who are engaged with the Young Alumni Council, founded in 2010.
- **Beverly Evans**: Selecting and confirming a major/minor, identifying appropriate experiential education opportunities, conducting an effective job and internship search, researching study abroad opportunities, and making effective graduate school decisions.
- **Matthew Randall:** Cultivating the habits of mind and behavior that promote academic and professional success, including strategies for excelling as a new college student and acquiring the interpersonal skills for the professional workplace.

Impact

Great-to-Greater

This series will help move York College from Great-to-Greater by strategically expanding the new First-Year Experience program through alumni mentoring that has high-impact potential for freshmen persistence, retention, and success.

Ultimately, this program seeks to positively impact four-year graduation rates by helping students actively inquire about academic and career planning in their first year, select an appropriate major sooner, and chart an early course toward developing an impressive college curricular and co-curricular portfolio that prepares them for life-long learning and a successful post-college career.

Disseminating Results

The results of this project will be disseminated through one or more of these channels:

- *YC: The York College of Pennsylvania Magazine.*
- Board of Trustees meetings.
- First-Year Experience presentations at Open House and Accepted Student Day events.
- Center for Teaching and Learning development workshops and resources.

Long-Term Sustainability

Once this project is successfully launched with a Great-to-Greater grant, the Director of First-Year Experience will propose an appropriate expansion of the FYE budget to absorb the costs of continuing the series on an annual basis.

Budget and Time Line

Budget

Dinners to feed up to 75 students and 10 alumni/staff at each event at $15/head for buffet dinner, drinks, and dessert	$5,000
Boxed lunches for students at site visits at alumni workplaces	$500
$100 Honorarium for each alumnus	$2,500
Incentive prizes to promote student attendance	$600
Supplies (large poster printing, table information tents, certificates of appreciation for alumni, name tags, etc.)	$100
Van mileage for transporting groups of students to alumni workplaces for follow-up site visits	$250
Total Budget	**$9,000**

Time Line

Spring 2016:

- Meet-up event and workshop theme planning
- Alumni recruitment for Fall 2016

Summer 2016:

- Design of promotional materials and purchase of all event materials and incentive prizes

Fall 2016:

- Two core engagement events, minimum of two related workshops, minimum of four site visits, all to be completed by November
- Mid-point assessment meeting of project partners in November
- Alumni recruitment for Spring 2017

Spring 2017:

- Two core engagement events, minimum of two related workshops, minimum of four site visits, all to be completed by April
- Final grant report by March
- Final assessment meeting of project partners in April