

Alpha Nu Sigma 2014 College Project Hallmark Award Entry

Briefly describe your College Project and who from the chapter and the college administration was involved in determining it?

Never Overlook Roads That Help! (NORTH) became the beacon that guided Alpha Nu Sigma's 2013 College Project. We introduced new students to academic resources available to help them succeed at Horry Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) in an effort to promote retention. When meeting with members of the College Project committee, HGTC President Neyle Wilson emphasized the need for a project accentuating the college mission, "To provide a student centered environment and inspire lifelong learning." He believes this is critical because the 2012 HGTC Community College Survey of Student Engagement indicates the use of writing, math and computer skills labs is an area of low student engagement. President Wilson suggested we collaborate with Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs Greg Thompson, Director of Student Engagement Jennifer Overholt-Mau and Assistant Vice President of Student Success and Support Dr. Melissa Batten, to develop ideas for our project. Additional meetings with administrators helped us determine the direction of NORTH.

Summarize your objectives for the College Project and the process by which the chapter and college administration set these objectives.

NORTH's overall objective was to inform new students about resources available at HGTC and the value of utilizing them during their academic journey. Soon after the meeting with President Wilson, the College Project committee brainstormed ideas with several administrators and finalized our objectives:

- Develop a document containing tips for success in college
- Facilitate three new student orientations
- Participate in HGTC's Welcome Week celebrations
- Collaborate with the Office of Academic Affairs to visit eight Freshman Skills (COL 100) classes

During a subsequent meeting with Dr. Batten, we created one additional objective: review the online new student orientation program, OCEANS (Orientation, Communication, Engagement, and Advisement for New Students), and provide student feedback to administration.

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Describe the planning process and strategies developed to complete the College Project.

Chapter members brainstormed and named the project NORTH to parallel the college's Quality Enhancement Plan entitled Guided Plan for Success (GPS). The chapter president elicited help creating a document containing tips for success in college. We asked chapter members to answer the question "What would have helped me on my first day at HGTC?" We compiled the responses and created our "First Day of School" checklist. We submitted it to Jennifer Overholt-Mau for approval to be distributed during new student orientations and Welcome Week celebrations. She approved the checklist for orientation. However, she requested a revised edition for Welcome Week which we completed. In order to conduct new student orientations, four members participated in a training session led by the Office of Student Engagement then coordinated dates and times for future orientations.

We met with Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Shirley Butler and Department Chair Allison Burlyn, who requested chapter members visit Freshman Skills classes. These classes are aimed at students who test at a developmental level and have low retention rates. We collaborated with professors to schedule visits in October. Committee members created an outline of points to emphasize during these visits. They designed a brochure which included campus maps highlighting important resources such as the library and skills labs. With input from chapter members, two new checklists entitled "Staying Successful in College" and "Staying Cool During Test Time" were incorporated into the brochure. When a designer took creative liberties, an unapproved version was distributed to our first Freshman Skills class. Officers were consulted and the brochure was quickly redesigned and approved for distribution in subsequent classes. Finally, three chapter members reviewed OCEANS from a new student's perspective and provided feedback to administration.

What are the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project, including the lessons learned by your chapter members and others?

NORTH created a path to success for almost 600 students. Four members enthusiastically attended new student orientation training with the Office of Student Engagement and facilitated two orientations in August. Jennifer Overholt-Mau stated in an e-mail to our advisors, "These ladies are doing an awesome job!!" and requested our return for Spring

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orientations. She also authorized a chapter officer to train two members to lead orientations in November. Over seventy-five new students, many accompanied by parents, attended our orientations. One parent asked several questions and after the orientation said, "Thank you for all your help. I hope my son will take your tips to heart." During Welcome Week, we answered student questions, handed out pencils imprinted with Never Overlook Roads That Help! and distributed the revised "First Day of School" checklist to over 350 students.

We addressed 150 students when five members visited Freshman Skills classes in October. We visited seven of the eight targeted classes because one professor did not respond to our request. Due to an emergency with one of our volunteers, two officers stepped in to cover the seventh class. During these visits we gave every student our brochure and surveyed them about the impact of our presentations. Out of the 150 respondents, we received negative feedback from only three. The sentiment of the remaining 147 students is best described by one who said: "I learned a lot from it, I didn't know this school had so much to offer." We also asked the professors for feedback. Their comments were positive and expressed a desire for us to return next semester. One professor stated, "My students enjoyed the visits. I cannot think of anything I would change other than having some young men come in as well." Additionally, Department Chair Allison Burlyn stated "I hope this is a practice that the Phi Theta Kappa members would like to continue to be involved in [during future semesters]."

Three chapter members noted their observations when reviewing the online orientation OCEANS. One member experienced technical difficulties getting the videos to play and another noted the "Chapter 4" video presenter mixes up her words while reading the college's FAFSA code. We summarized and sent fifteen suggestions for improvement to college administrators Greg Thompson, Jennifer Overholt-Mau, Dr. Batten and Dr. Marilyn Fore, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. Dr. Fore stated, "Thanks. Students are the best audience." Dr. Batten thanked us for the review and stated they would begin making revisions based on our suggestions.

Upon reflection of NORTH, chapter members discovered that we grew as scholar-servant-leaders through completion of this project. We became campus leaders when we applied our training and took an active role presenting at new student orientations and in Freshman Skills classes. We improved our communication and public speaking skills by interacting with administrators, professors and students. We also learned valuable leadership lessons about conflict

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resolution, chain of command protocols and time management as we overcame our challenges. Looking back on her experience, a member said, "I feel like we were able to truly connect with other students to help them succeed in achieving their goals." From the feedback received in Freshman Skills classes, we learned the importance of student-to-student interaction. A student stated, "I enjoyed the presentation being said from another student rather than a teacher because I can relate more." We realized that by reaching out to fellow students we can be a beacon to guide their success.

What is left undone or what opportunities remain for the future?

Positive student feedback inspired us to expand our reach. With administration's support we will prepare two video recordings for new students. One recording could be integrated into the OCEANS online orientations and the other incorporated into Freshman Skills curricula. Additional opportunities for Freshman Skills classes include establishing a mentor program and increasing the diversity of our presenters since we only had white females participate.