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Senior Service Report

Project Summary

This project aimed to create an open and welcoming environment to discuss topics related to sexual health and behavior through the use of lectures and informational sessions with students. According to the National Conference of State Legislature, there are only 24 states in the United States that have a mandate on what is required to be taught of sexual education to students (Deme, 2016). However, the curriculum that is taught may not be uniform across states and as such there is a lot of inconsistency in knowledge for students. In addition, there are many young people that do not live in a state or situation where they are able to discuss topics of sexual health at home or in school. This leads to misinformation and potential harm for young adults. By providing lectures and education for university students, this leads to an environment where students are more informed and more comfortable seeking out proper help and education in subjects related to sexual health and behaviors.

Second, this project aims to increase the knowledge and education of Mercer students on topics related to sexual health and behaviors through lectures and informational sessions. The CDC has reported that the age demographic of 15-24 years old's account for over half of the new cases of sexually transmitted infections diagnosed every year (Deme, 2016). For students that have not received the proper education on safe sexual practices and behaviors, this can leave them vulnerable to potential harm. Sexual education and discussion on sexual topics is pertinent to college campuses. Students have a new sense of freedom and sexual agency when they live independently on a college campus for the first time, which places heightened importance on education on sexual topics for those students who lack the education to make informed decisions regarding their health (Deme, 2016).

The main goals of this project were to set up lectures from professionals for Mercer Undergraduate students to attend. This project also aimed to set up peer to peer comprehensive sexual education for select Mercer Undergraduate students to receive lessons from another student. This was done in the idea that students may be more open and willing to ask questions if taught by their peer. Lastly, this project aimed to diversify the knowledge of the Mercer Undergraduate students on campus by hosting a movie and discussion regarding a topic not well covered in classes. This project worked with Macon professionals, Mercer faculty, as well as Mercer Undergraduate Students.

Analysis and Evaluation

This project has evolved since its conception in order to be the most effective and realistic for the needs of the campus and its students. This project initially set out to establish a sexual education curriculum to be taught in University 101 classes to first semester freshman students. After speaking with Peer Advisors, this project concluded that the schedule for this class would not be able to accommodate any additions. This project then shifted to reaching out to Resident Assistants to attempt to teach freshman residents comprehensive sexual education. Unfortunately, the Spring semester is very busy for Resident Assistants and they were not able to allow me to come in to teach their residents. At the completion of this project, one professional (Marc Prevette, licensed marriage and family therapist) gave a lecture on comprehensive sexual education and the laws regarding that education. Peer to Peer education was completed with over 50 Mercer Undergraduate students, and a movie discussion was hosted in which participants learned about and discussed the LGBTQ community and activism. This project did complete comprehensive sexual education for Mercer students through peer to peer education and lectures. This project also focused on an aspect of sexual education, LGBTQ rights and activism, that are not typically discussed.

There were many challenges to this project that presented barriers to its completion. The first was that this project was completed without a student partner. This project had high goals that may have been easier to accomplish if there had been another person to help achieve them. The timing of this project also presented a challenge. Although this project was intended for Fall 2018, exterior factors prohibited this from occurring and instead had to be completed during the Spring of 2019. This presented a challenge in organizing all events to be done in a specific time span. Another challenge brought forth was by Mercer administration. The previous students that did this project had the goal of making a political statement with their version, which the Provost was hesitant about. After speaking with Mercer administrators, the project shifted to focus more on the education of the students rather than to start a movement.

The continued support of faculty and project advisors were instrumental to the success of this project. It would not have been accomplished if the project advisor had not helped with the evolution of what this project turned into.

Recommendations

There are many things that could have been improved upon to have made a more successful service project. A project partner, whether another student, faculty, or community member, would have greatly aided in the success of this project. Another person would have allowed for more collaboration and a better distribution of the work. It may have also allowed for more goals to be accomplished throughout the course of the project. Throughout this project, I have learned more about the importance of time management in this project. Timing was important in regards to contacting people for the lecture, getting reservations for rooms in at a reasonable time, and setting up times for peer to peer education. It was also important to learn to be flexible throughout the course of this service project due to the ways in which it evolved through its life course. Collaborating with a community partner

would have also made this a more successful project as it may have been able to spread beyond Mercer's campus.

I have learned a lot throughout the course of this project. I learned a lot about my strengths as a project coordinator and time management. I learned that imposing deadlines would have created more success for this project. I also learned that I am not the best at reaching out to people in the community to ask them if they would be willing to volunteer their time. It is a skill to be able to open yourself up to ask people to help you, which is something I need to work on. I also wish I could have completed this project earlier, but other factors prohibited this from occurring.

Dissemination Plan

To disseminate the results of this project, a poster was presented at Mercer's Bear Day. The poster was presented from 6:30-7:30, but was available for viewing until the next day. People were able to ask questions and hear about the project. The main audience of this dissemination was Mercer students and faculty that came to Bear Day Poster presentations. Many faculty remarked that the continuation of sexual education in college was a relevant issue and they hoped someone would continue this work.

References

Deme, J. (2016). Sex Education on the College Campus. Retrieved from

<https://pha.berkeley.edu/2016/12/16/sex-education-on-the-college-campus/>