Louisiana Tech SGA Mentoring Project
Grant Proposal

Overview

The Student Government Association (SGA) at Louisiana Tech University seeks funding to support The Solution: A Mentoring Program. This project will initially engage 50 college students in a one-on-one mentoring relationship with 50 9th grade students from four high schools in Lincoln Parish. The mentoring is intended to provide continuous support, in the form of tutoring, college preparatory assistance, and social activities, through high school graduation. Each year, an additional 50 college students will be paired with an additional 50 high school students, directly impacting 150 high school students over three years. A second focus for our mentors will be reaching out to rural schools through the Louisiana GEAR UP program. Teams of mentors will travel to those schools to provide mentoring and support through Explorers Clubs established at each of the 39 middle and high schools involved in that program. It is expected that this project will impact the communities served by increasing the number of low-income students that graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education.

The SGA, including Caleb Smith, President, and Laura Hogan, Freshman Class President, will provide organizational and financial support for the project, assisted by Glenn Beer and Dawn Basinger, Faculty Advisors. Mentors will be recruited from among the general student population. K-12 students will be recruited from, and with the support of, Lincoln parish Schools. Danny Bell, Superintendent of Lincoln parish, has agreed to assist with program implementation. LA GEAR UP schools will be recruited with the assistance of that program’s staff as well as Glenn Beer who directs the statewide management of the LA GEAR UP summer/academic year learning projects.

Recruiting for the project will begin in January, 2007. Mentors will submit applications to the SGA, and applications for mentees will be distributed to all 8th grade students in the parish. Selected mentors will begin training and enroll in initial service learning course during the spring quarter 2007. At the beginning of the fall quarter, an orientation meeting/dinner is planned where mentors and mentees, along with their
family members, meet and begin planning activities for the year. At least two campus-based events are planned per quarter (total of six per year). One is primarily academic, with an emphasis on tutoring in the academic areas identified through the pre-test, and one is primarily a fun, social event such as attending a ball game. Between organized events, mentors will arrange additional meetings (in small group settings) to strengthen relationships, address academic needs, and to monitor student progress toward graduation and postsecondary education. Mentors will assist with the planning and convening of the Explorers Club State Conference to be held at Louisiana Tech in April where they will meet Explorers Club members and begin planning for the 2007-08 academic year.

Needs

The SGA recognizes the debilitating impact of poverty, particularly on young K-12 Louisianans. In Louisiana Tech’s home Parish, Lincoln, for example, over 57% of K-12 students live in poverty as evidenced by their eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. Low income students traditionally perform at significantly lower levels than their higher SES peers on standardized tests, and enter postsecondary education at lower rates than higher SES students. This in a state where only 64% of high school students successfully graduate from high school, and only 16% of adults possess a college degree. In a recent report, The Silent Epidemic, high school dropouts surveyed suggested that the lack of a single caring person in their school environment was a significant factor in their decision to drop out of school. Add to that the fact that for many low-income students, there are no family member role models who have attended college to provide guidance as to which courses to take in high school, financial aid opportunities, and other considerations. Providing continuous one-on-one mentoring to low-income students can address all of these factors. In addition, The Solution includes a scholarship component that will provide financial rewards for participating students. In addition to addressing needs through research, focus group meetings were conducted with local school system officials, classroom teachers, and the K-12 students themselves. Students were encouraged to assist the SGA in identifying specific ways in which a mentoring program could address their needs. Opportunities to interact with a college student and to
participate in college-based activities were suggested to address student needs and will be incorporated into The Solution mentoring program. The same problems exist in LA GEAR UP schools, but the situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of those schools are in isolated rural areas with no university close by.

Recovery

One of the goals of this project is to develop a model mentoring program that can be adopted and implemented by the SGA (or other campus organizations) at all Louisiana Colleges and Universities. It is envisioned that a program handbook would be developed and distributed to those institutions that would provide detailed instructions, organizational, logistical, and programming information that would facilitate the organization of a similar mentoring program at other institutions. In this way, all areas of Louisiana would be directly impacted by The Solution.

Although Lincoln Parish was not directly impacted by the devastation caused by Katrina and Rita, the secondary impacts were felt throughout Louisiana. Consider the thousands of displaced persons that were temporarily housed in Lincoln parish and the hundreds of displaced K-12 students attending the local schools. Due to the trauma associated with living in temporary housing, etc., many of the displaced students’ academic performance suffered significantly. While the primary goal of this project is to improve the academic success and postsecondary aspirations of the participating mentees, The Solution mentoring program will feature college mentors working directly with high school students in an effort to instill in them the value and essential nature of volunteerism. In fact, participation in service projects is a required component of the program.

In addition to identifying and addressing specific community needs identified through the project, participants will examine the impact and response to the influx of displaced students in the K-12 setting in an effort to identify ways in which college and K-12 students can provide support services to effected individuals, particularly through tutoring and establishing mentoring relationships. The development of a systematic
response to future catastrophes will be one of the outcomes of the project. The plan will be enhanced by applying lessons learned and best practices from this mentoring program.

Partners

In order to strengthen The Solution, ensure long-term sustainability, and to promote statewide implementation of the program, the SGA has sought to establish a number of essential partnerships throughout the state. The SGA has secured the support of the Louisiana Tech University administration, as well as several departments within the University. The College of Education and the student counseling Center have already committed faculty and expertise to support the project. In addition, the LaCOSBP has adopted The Solution mentoring program as one of its major initiatives for the upcoming year, indicating a commitment to implementing this model program at member institutions based on the model developed and refined through this proposal.

The Lincoln Parish School System has supported the need for this project and has pledged assistance in identifying and recruiting participants from the local high schools. Another partnerships has been established with the Louisiana GEAR UP project. That organization, representing 39 middle and high schools throughout Louisiana, has pledged $5,000 in cash to support the transportation of teams of college mentors to LA GEAR UP schools to assist them in establishing and operating Explorers Clubs. These clubs have, at the middle and high school level, the mission of increasing the number of low income students that enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

During the implementation phase of the project, additional partnerships will be sought to provide funding for scholarships, incentives, and other program needs. As the program is adopted statewide, partnerships with university SGAs and other student organizations will be established, and assistance from the various university systems (ULS, LSU, etc.) will be needed. Presentations to various Boards and committees will be developed and creating publicity for the program will be essential components of the plan.

An integral component of the training provided to college mentors will be evaluating the available data and research available relating to poverty and education in Louisiana. Through the evaluation of available information at the state and local level,
mentors will be asked to identify specific interventions that, based on the available information, would likely positively impact graduation rates and participation in postsecondary education. After identifying potential strategies, they will develop evaluation measures for each strategy adopted. Additionally, mentors will work with middle and high school student members of Explorers Clubs in the eleven school systems served by Louisiana GEAR UP to identify community needs and assist those clubs in developing action plans to provide solutions to the identified needs.

Through reflective journaling, mentors will consider other factors that they believe may contribute to lower than expected student achievement. These factors may relate to the school, the students’ family situation, or other factors. Through on-line and face-to-face meetings with other mentors and project staff, additional strategies may be developed or existing strategies modified to better serve the needs of the targeted students based on emerging information. Mentors will also consider factors that the mentee brings to their attention, such as peer pressure and other factors. Working collaboratively, the mentors and mentees may propose new strategies and evaluation measures to address these issues as well. The guiding principle will be addressing specific needs identified through the project and quantitative evaluation of all potential solutions.

Participation

The SGA will assume primary responsibility for implementation of this project. Guidance and oversight will be provided by a faculty advisor, but the general direction of the project will be completely governed by the students at Louisiana Tech University. The SGA has already started the process of identifying a specific community need, proposing a solution, and implementing a plan. The development of measurable outcomes of the project has been addressed, and additional goals, intervention strategies, and evaluation plans may emerge as students begin the actual mentoring process.

It is expected that additional needs may be identified that may not be addressed specifically through a mentoring program may be identified. Participating students will then be asked to develop proposals for new service-learning initiatives that may be implemented by the university in response to these specific identified needs. With a
faculty advisor, new service learning courses may be developed as an additional outcome of this project.

The SGA has already assumed a leadership role in implementing The Solution, and has garnered support for additional similar programs at other institutions throughout Louisiana. The SGA has determined that the development of a model program, including handbooks, sample documents, etc. should be a major emphasis for this project.

Working with Explorers Club members, college mentors will assist middle and high school students in the process of identifying needs in their communities that the club members could address. The planning, implementation, and evaluation of these projects will be the responsibility of the Explorers Club members in collaboration with their college mentors.

Engaging

This project requires significant collaboration among all participants, including the SGA, university administration, the College of Education, the Student Counseling Center, the Lincoln Parish School System, and each of the four high schools. For any initiative to be successful, every partner must be willing to contribute in a meaningful way to achieving the goals of the project, and should feel that they are benefiting from participation in the endeavor as well. Current partners include the university administration which has provided assurances that university facilities will be available for project activities at no cost to the project. The university has a vested interest in the success of a mentoring program that encourages low-income high school students to pursue postsecondary education.

The College of Education has agreed to provide faculty time and expertise to assist with the academic components of the project. An added benefit for the college is that teacher candidates may provide volunteer services to support program objectives which provide them with a unique field experience that will enrich the teacher preparation program. The Louisiana Tech Foundation has committed financial resources to support the project, and views their participation as an investment in the future growth of the university. The Lincoln Parish School System supports this project as it views one
of the potential outcomes to be improved academic performance among participating students, a key component of the state accountability system. The local Chamber of Commerce has also committed to support the project by identifying members who could provide financial and in-kind support to the program. In their view, the project is an investment in the future growth of the local and state economy, which is directly aligned with their stated mission and purpose. Additional partnerships will be formed as the project continues. Establishing such partnerships is an important element of the project plan.

Goals

College students serving in the Solution mentoring program will be required to enroll in two service learning courses. The first course will be offered during the spring quarter 2007. The emphasis during this phase of the project will be analyzing data and conducting research relative to identifying specific need of the local system. In addition, through professional presentations, mentors will be provided with training that will include effective teaching strategies, adolescent psychology, and others that are designed to help them become the most effective mentors possible. Additionally, mentors will attend the annual Explorers Club State Conference and Leadership summit in April at Louisiana Tech.

Approximately 400 Explorers Club members will attend the conference and will have the opportunity at that time to meet potential college/club mentors. During this phase, mentors will be completing a journal/portfolio that will provide documentation of their completion of the tasks identified. A second component of the project will be the creation of a mentoring program handbook that will delineate the steps necessary to implement a successful mentoring program. This handbook will be disseminated statewide through the LACOSP organization to assist other institutions in implementing a similar program.

During the fall quarter 2007, mentors will participate in a second service learning course. Mentors will meet with mentees and together develop an action plan for the year that will identify specific individual goals for the K-12 students and the activities necessary for them to reach those goals. An awards banquet in Spring 2008 will publicly
recognize those students that have successfully implemented their action plan. Through these experiences, mentors will develop important skills in organization, public speaking, budgeting, pedagogy, and counseling. Specific outcomes will be evaluated through the mentor portfolios required as a component of the service learning courses associated with the project.

**Sustainability**

Sustaining The Solution mentoring program beyond the term of this grant is an integral part of the proposed plan. Initially, the SGA will provide funds from their operating budget and the Louisiana Tech Foundation will continue to provide resources. The SGA will also conduct a 5-K run each year to raise money for the program. Last year, local business sponsors provided $800 in cash and an additional $400 in gift certificates and other prizes to support the mentoring program. With LA GEAR UP as a partner, it is anticipated that they will provide $5,000 per year to support transportation. The SGA is committed to continuing the mentoring program and will continue to search for additional partners to provide the financial resources to support it.

**Reflection**

Reflection and success celebrations are hallmarks of the Solution mentoring program. College mentors will maintain a project journal as a required component of the service learning course. The journal will provide the opportunity for continuous reflection about the project, the mentors’ perceptions about the impact of their service and the value of service learning. Presentations to local school boards, school principals, parents, and others are part of the implementation plan. Documenting progress and participation will include a requirement for students to collect pictures, newspaper articles, and other memorabilia related to the mentoring program. An awards banquet is planned for the spring of each year to honor mentors as well as to honor the students participating in the program for various achievements. Scholarships will be awarded to participating students based on academic achievement, most improvement in academics, commitment and enthusiasm, and outstanding community service.
Capacity

This project will result in the creation of two service learning courses at Louisiana Tech. Through our Center for Educational Excellence, the faculty advisors for this project will make a presentation to other university faculty describing their experience with service learning and to advocate for the creation of additional courses at the university. Through our partnership with the College of Education, teacher candidates will be introduced to the concept of service learning through their participation in the tutoring sessions. K-12 teachers who serve as sponsors of the Explorers Clubs at LA GEAR UP schools have already been introduced to service learning and have been encouraged to develop service learning projects that could be funded through grant opportunities offered by the Louisiana Learn and Serve Commission. One of the goals of this project is to advocate for greater emphasis on service learning both at the K-12 and university levels. Since our project includes representatives from K-12 schools (current teachers and students), universities (students and faculty advisors), and future K-12 educators who are now teacher candidates in the College of Education, we feel that the impact of this project will have a strong and enduring positive impact on the institutionalization of service learning in Louisiana’s K-16 education system.

Financial

As state earlier, the SGA at Louisiana tech has committed up to $12,000 in support of this project. Local businesses have provided $800 in sponsorships to date, and the Louisiana tech University Foundation has committed $____ so far. In addition, Louisiana GEAR UP has committed $5,000 in cash to support our partnership with the schools in their organization. The faculty advisors to this project have committed their time to the project as an in-kind match. It is estimated that each of the advisors will provide one month of service to support the Solution (approximately $10,000) at no cost to the project. Additional partners will be identified and recruited as the project develops.
Youth

The following school districts will be served by this project:
Lincoln Parish 57% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Franklin Parish 76% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Madison Parish 84% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Monroe City Schools 77% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
East Carroll Parish 93% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Washington Parish 84% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
East Feliciana Parish 85% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
St. Helena Parish 85% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Pointe Coupee Parish 79% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Sabine Parish 65% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Orleans Parish 77% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
St. John the Baptist Parish 82% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch
Avoyelles Parish 80% Free or Reduced Priced Lunch

Conference

Outstanding college mentors, particularly those involved in the development of a model program, will be asked to make a presentation at a number of regional and national conferences. Travel funds would be provided to cover expenses associated with presentations at the state LACOSP conference. In addition, the National Council for Community Education Partnerships holds a national GEAR UP conference each year. Funds will support one SGA representative and one mentor to make a presentation at this national conference in San Francisco in July 2007. LA GEAR UP will share the expenses.