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- 2) Utilizing True Colors™ to Enhance Team-building and Communication Skills in a College Ambassador Program
- 3) Practice Paper
- 4) Abstract
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- 5) Yes, please consider this proposal for a poster if it is not first accepted as a paper.
- 6) Biography
Ms. Jamie Cowell-Lucero is the Director of Alumni Relations for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. In this role, she serves as the faculty advisor to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Ambassadors. Ms. Cowell-Lucero recently joined the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education to pursue a doctoral degree with a focus on student leadership development in college.

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Utilizing True Colors™ to Enhance Team-building and Communication Skills in a College Ambassador Program

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Abstract

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Introduction

The Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) Ambassador program was implemented in 2001 with the mission of, “Developing leaders through service to and assistance for collegiate and student initiatives for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences” (CALS Ambassador Handbook, 2007, p. 15). The stated objectives of the program were to “(1) develop student leadership through service-learning activities, (2) promote and collaborate with alumni and development offices to promote college interests, (3) promote

interest in the college by providing visibility and public relations on behalf of the college, and (4) enhance recruitment of prospective students” (CALs Ambassador Handbook, 2007, p. 15).

The program is open to all undergraduate students in the college with at least 30 hours of completed coursework and a minimum 2.6 grade point average. Each applicant is required to complete an application which includes a resume, response to a series of essay questions, and the request of a reference letter from a faculty member on their behalf. Each applicant is interviewed by the executive committee and faculty advisor of the program. Membership requirements are attendance at monthly meetings and completing a designated number of service hours each semester.

Over the course of the last seven years, the program has had four different faculty advisors and has been under the administrative leadership of two college Deans and three Academic Associate Deans. These inconsistencies resulted in the lack of a clear picture of the role of the program in the college. In addition, with the need for general assistance in helping to set up various college special events and changes in the format of undergraduate recruiting for the college, the clarity of the four original objectives of the program was clouded.

The first objective, to develop student leadership through service-learning activities, is the main concern. The role of college Ambassadors became diluted with providing labor at college functions that did not require much more than physical activity and their presence. Little attention was given to the students’ leadership development as a member of the Ambassadors. Assisting with college special and recruiting events does not leave time in the students’ schedules to focus on service projects that develop student leadership. The few service projects completed in the last three years were individual efforts rather than the work of the team.

Bennis and Nanus stated, 'leadership is what gives an organization its vision and its ability to translate the vision into reality' (Connors, Velez, and Swan, 2006, p. 94). The leaders of undergraduate student organizations in colleges of agriculture are our future leaders of agricultural businesses and organizations, so it is vital that they are afforded opportunities to develop their leadership skills while at the university (Connors et al., 2006). "According to *A Social Change Model of Leadership Development* (H.S. Astin and A. Astin (1996, p. 10)), 'service is a powerful vehicle for developing students' leadership skills'"(Althaus, 1997). Althaus (1997) described the outcomes of the Benedictine University course, *Leadership and Social Context*, in which the curriculum "taught leadership using the pedagogy of service-learning" (p.123). The course "integrated leadership practice, academic inquiry, community service, and the knowledge students have gained from their past and present experiences to actively analyze and practice leadership" (Althaus, 1997, p.123). The students enrolled in the course took their first steps to recognizing leadership, assessing their own skills, and developing a personal leadership model (Althaus, 1997).

According to a study by Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001), students who "participated in leadership education and training programs showed growth in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values" (p.15).

In the past, specific leadership training and development for the Ambassadors was limited to one annual activity. In addition, attention to leadership development for the members of the CALS Ambassador team became a low priority. The diversity of the membership, leadership background, and field of study appear to have inhibited a cohesive, team-oriented environment in membership meetings and projects. In addition, the constant influx of new

members at the start of each semester makes it difficult to integrate new Ambassadors into the group.

In an attempt to refocus the program on its original mission and objectives, leadership training activities have become a major priority in the 2007-2008 academic year. At the fall semester retreat, a current member (with assistance from the executive committee), led the members in a workshop on team-building. At the spring semester retreat, efforts were made to help the members understand each other on a more personal level, so that they could begin to dissolve the barriers of diverse leadership backgrounds and fields of study.

The most powerful activity of the retreat was the assessment and activities associated with the True Colors™ personality typing system. This paper will illustrate the personality makeup of the members of the Ambassador program and provide observations of how completing this activity impacted the teamwork and communication skills of the Ambassador team.

Background

True Colors™ was developed in 1978 by Don Lowry. In an attempt to establish a personality assessment that was easy to understand, apply, and retain, Lowry blended education and entertainment by combining audience interaction with insightful materials (True Colors™ web site). The mission of the programs is to enhance the way we live, work, communicate, and interact with those around us (True Colors™ web site). The programs expand upon previous work in the areas of temperament types, and personality and learning theory of David Keirsey, Marilyn Bates, Carl Jung, Katherine Briggs, and Isabel Myers.

Personality type theory, proposed by Carl Jung in 1923, “hypothesized that people exhibit biologically based, naturally preferred behaviors that can be classified according to attitude type and function type” (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998). “The merit of the theory” presented by Myers and Briggs “enables us to expect specific personality differences in particular people and to cope with the people and the differences in a constructive way” (I. Briggs Myers and P.B. Meyers, 1995, p. 1). “The basic personality differences concern the way people perceive and the way they make judgments” (Myers and Myers, 1995, p. 1). In the 1950’s, referencing Jung’s personality type theory, Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs devised the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator that identified sixteen different temperament types (Keirsey and Bates, 1984). “Myers believed that each individual demonstrates a preference for either perception or judgment when dealing with the outside environment” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 246). The preferences (extraversion-introversion (EI), sensing-intuition (SN), thinking-feeling (TF), and judging-perception (JP)) are organized into the sixteen different temperament types (Evans et al., 1998).

Keirsey and Bates temperament theory partitions the eight preferences suggested by Myers-Briggs into four temperament types, rather than 16, as they believed the four types better explained people’s behavior (Evans et al., 1998). These four types are: Dionysian or Artisan (SP), Epimethean or Guardian (SJ), Promethean or Rational (NT), and Apollonian or Idealist (NF) (Evans et al., 1998; Keirsey and Bates, 1984; Keirsey, 1998).

Having studied the work of Keirsey and Bates, Lowry developed a color spectrum which represents four different temperament types or “personality styles”: Blue, Gold, Green, and Orange (True Colors™ web site; Miscisin, 2005). Honaker (2001) describes each of the four temperament types with the following adjectives: Blue represents a personality who is

harmonious, compassionate, and communicative; Gold represents a personality who is organized, responsible, and orderly; Green represents a personality who is inventive, theoretical, and philosophical; and Orange represents a personality who is spontaneous, active, and realistic.

It is important to note that the True Colors™ programs recognize that all people are a unique blend of characteristics and the four colors (Miscisin, 2005). Each color has particular strengths and analyzes, conceptualizes, understands, interacts, and learns differently (True Colors™ web site). By identifying the color or temperament type that best represents an individual's dominant character, there is increased awareness of what motivates, frustrates, or stresses each type of personality (Meadows, 2008). By understanding these differences there is the opportunity to include everyone's unique strengths, increase productivity, create new ideas, improve communication, and develop relationships (Meadows, 2008). As stated by Meadows, "Personality is one's first personal property" (personal communication, February 16, 2008).

Description of the Practice

The True Colors™ workshop was administered to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Ambassadors as part of the 2007-2008 academic year spring retreat by Dr. Robert Meadows, state 4-H director emeritus, Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Sixteen Ambassadors (13 females and three males), the Associate Dean of academic programs (female), and program advisor (female) completed the workshop. All of the undergraduate majors and academic levels of sophomore, junior, and senior were represented.

A large open conference room in one of the college's academic buildings served as the location for the workshop. The room was set up in theatre-style seating for the introduction and assessment portions of the workshop then the members of each color were seated in four

opposite corners of the room. Each corner was designated by a poster representing one of the four colors (Blue, Green, Gold, or Blue). Groups were provided markers and large sheets of paper to record their responses to each of the activities.

After a brief introduction of the True Colors™ program and group participation in identifying the characteristics of others that were unfavorable, the participants were asked to move to the area of the room where the adjective on the poster best represented their personality. The following adjectives were used: Harmonious (Blue), Responsible (Gold), Curious (Green), and Adventurous (Orange). The participants then were brought back together to complete the True Colors™ Word Cluster Instrument. Described by Honaker (2001), the instrument is a self-report, self-scorable, Likert scale instrument in which individuals were asked to rank five sets of adjectives for each of the four personality types according to those most like the subject with a score of four, to those least like the subject with a score of one. The possible range of scores for any one personality type is zero to 20 (Honaker 2001).

In the final assessment, the participants were asked to respond to a series of ten questions that related to determining the personality types of introversion or extraversion.

Activity 1

Following the assessments, the participants were seated at the poster corresponding to their dominant color. One member of each group was selected as the recorder. Each group was instructed to list adjectives that described the traits of their respective personality type. The recorder of each group read the responses to all of the other participants.

Activity 2

For the second activity, each group was asked to describe an elementary school in which only students with their same personality type could enroll. They were to include the school's

motto, mascot, song, and two games that would be incorporated into the curriculum. The recorder of each group read the responses to all of the other participants.

Activity 3

The third activity entailed each group listing the traits that they appreciated about each of the other three personality types. Each group read the responses to all of the other participants. The workshop moderator then read a list of traits that were not favorable of each of the personality types.

Activity 4

The results of the final assessment to determine introversion or extraversion were reviewed. The moderator provided examples of how each of the personality types would respond to various situations.

Following a brief presentation of data describing various age groups and the distribution of the four personality types among the age groups, the participants were asked to complete a workshop evaluation. The students were later asked to respond to a series of six short answer questions sent by e-mail.

Results to Date

The distribution of personality types within the participants were as follows: Blue (one female), Gold (five females, two males), Green (five females, one male), Orange (four females). It should be noted that the two administrators were included in the five females with a Gold personality type.

The results of the evaluation were very positive, with scores of over four in a scale of one to five for all questions. The written comments also were very positive indicating a better understanding of one's self and others.

The most informative and descriptive observations resulted from the answers to the questions sent by e-mail. The six questions were as follows: (1) How did True Colors™ help you to better understand and/or identify your own personality traits and the traits of others? (2) How do you see yourself using the skills and information you learned from True Colors™ in your classes, organizations, personal relationships, etc.? Please expand on how you think you and the other members can apply these skills and information to the Ambassador program. (3) Is this activity something that we should repeat on a regular basis? How often? (4) Did you especially like or dislike any particular part of the activity? (5) Were you comfortable sharing your thoughts and ideas with the larger group and your color group? (6) Do you have any suggestions for further workshops both using True Colors™ and incorporating new leadership and team-building activities?

Six students responded to the e-mail survey. Four themes emerged from their responses.

Theme 1

A better understanding of how and why people behave the way that they do resulted. Student B commented, "It was nice to see what other Ambassadors' colors are. It explains a lot in how we interact, why people sign up for certain events or drift to a specific job without notice of their actions, and how we function together".

Theme 2

The potential of applying the skills learned to improve teamwork within the organization was anticipated. Student C commented, "In the Ambassador program, I think better teamwork

will result from the True Colors™ program. I think people will take more effort in considering everybody's opinions".

Theme 3

All respondents agreed that the True Colors™ program should be repeated. Their suggestions varied regarding the scheduling of the program. Generally, they all believed new members and those members who were not able to participate in a prior program should be required to complete the workshop.

Theme 4

All respondents were comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas and felt an instant camaraderie with the members of their respective groups. Student E stated, "Even though my group (Gold) was the largest of the four groups and I tend to be more introverted, I felt comfortable with these people because there was an automatic sense of commonality"

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the True Colors™ program indicate the Ambassador program is headed in a positive direction in re-building the mission and objectives of the program outlined seven years ago. The students have a better understanding of each other's personality types and can use this knowledge to better communicate with fellow members. According to the literature in the area of service-learning, encouraging the students to continue their commitments to community service projects, especially those that require a team approach has the potential to continue to build upon their abilities to work as a team and to develop their leadership skills.

Additional personality assessments also may be helpful. Specifically, "Myers's concepts when used in staff development and team-building workshops are designed to help individuals

understand each other and appreciate the different approaches each person brings to the organization” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 257). According to Evans et al. (1998), “personality type concepts can be effectively introduced in leadership development classes or workshops” (p. 257). Programs such as StrengthsQuest and Collegiate Life Knowledge also would be important programs to consider for future retreats. “StrengthsQuest is Gallup's strengths development program for college-age students. It gives students the opportunity to develop based on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. In other words, it helps students learn what they do best, then build their lives on those talents. The program helps students discover and develop their greatest talents, use their strengths to improve their grades and increase their learning, strategically determine a rewarding career path, and focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses” (StrengthsQuest web site). Collegiate Life Knowledge is program developed by the members of The Consortium of Collegiate Agricultural Organizations to provide leadership and personal development resources to college students.

In conclusion, this attempt to utilize the True Colors™ program to enhance team-building and communication skills in the college Ambassador program of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech provided positive results and was a good first step to re-applying the program’s objective of developing student leaders.

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