

**B.A.S.I.C Training:
Building and Achieving Success in Chapters through
Adventure-Learning Focusing on Leadership and Teamwork**

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Introduction

Leadership education and training is the foundation of any successful student organization. In student leadership organizations, like the FFA, teacher leaders (advisors) strive to help students develop their potential for premier leadership through a variety of experiences, ranging from classroom instruction to competitive team activities. Students are given the opportunity to hold leadership positions in the form of a chapter office. If young leaders (i.e. FFA chapter officer teams) are to be successful in different areas and on different levels, all members of the team must possess the skills necessary to lead. Leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness (Maxwell, 2002).

It has been determined that FFA contributes to leadership development in young people (Dormody & Seevers, 1994; Ricketts & Rudd, 2004; Townsend & Carter, 1983) - an attribute that will help an individual throughout life. Leadership may be inborn, but it is more about practice and reflection on experiences than personality or genetic birthright (Bennis, 1989; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Perhaps the practice and experience inherent in FFA activities contributes to youth leadership development. In addition to traditional career/leadership development events, adventure-based learning programs can also serve as an exciting environment designed to teach hands-on leadership and team building skills to students and advisors.

Building and Achieving Success In Chapters (BASIC) is an adventure-based camp environment in [State]. The overarching goal of BASIC is to develop successful and effective FFA chapter officer teams and members. It is also used to train other high school student organization leaders, collegiate pre-service teachers, and adult leadership teams. The objectives of BASIC are to:

1. Increase chapter or organizational involvement
2. Develop unity
3. Build trust
4. Improve communication skills
5. Create a team environment and strengthen team concepts
6. Develop confidence, leadership, and cooperation

Background

The BASIC program is housed at the [State] FFA-FCCLA Center in [City, State]. The year-round educational conference facility hosts over 20,000 campers annually. While most FFA members participate in the chapter officer training held at the center during the summer

months, the BASIC program is open to students and teachers throughout the entire year.

In 2002, a local FFA chapter built the Leadership Course, which was used for low-ropes teambuilding programs and as an obstacle course. The BASIC program was developed and launched in 2005, providing a strategic leadership and teambuilding experience for FFA chapter officer teams and the many other organizations that utilize the center. One full-time coordinator and two additional full-time staff facilitate the BASIC program year-round. Of the 25 college students who serve on staff during the summer, five to eight also serve as BASIC trainers.

How it Works

To accomplish their goal of developing effective teams, the BASIC staff leads participants through the following activities:

1. Team Initiatives – These are low-impact activities that present “challenges” and invite the group to come up with a workable solution. Facilitator-led reviewing reveals basic team concepts like cooperation, communication, trust and commitment.
2. Low Ropes Course – These are more physically challenging elements that are supervised by qualified facilitators. Students continue to develop and apply teamwork skills.
3. Obstacle Course - A competitive course that combines the various elements and tests students on the concepts they have learned.
3. Team Recreation - Students have fun playing softball and volleyball while applying the team concepts they have learned.
5. Chapter Planning - A time for advisors to spend with students, applying the concepts learned toward planning the chapter’s program of activities.
6. Meals and Lodging - The [State] FFA-FCCLA Center is a full service environment capable of providing meals and comfortable lodging for participants.

The BASIC program is designed for officer teams, entire chapters, or multiple chapters. The program is not limited to FFA or FCCLA organizations - any school organization is welcome. It is recommended that multiple chapters participate in the program together. The BASIC staff can accommodate from 10 people to 100 people. BASIC is available anytime during the year and reservations are required.

There are two standard packages. The day only option consists of team building, team recreation, chapter planning and lunch. The day cost is \$15.00 per person. The overnight option consists of team building and obstacle course, team recreation, chapter planning, three meals, and lodging in bunk cabins. The overnight cost is \$35.00 per person.

Results to Date

In 2006, approximately 1,200 participants completed the BASIC training program. However, it is estimated that only ten percent of those student were FFA members. According to the program director, most of the participants were mixed groups from a single high school (i.e.: some FFA members, some FCCLA members, some from DECA, etc.). She also saw an increase in sports teams who participated in program.

The BASIC program has expanded to meet the needs of other student and adult groups. For example, members of 2006 [State] Agri-Leaders Forum participated in BASIC for their first meeting of the year, pulling together professionals from different backgrounds to build unity, improve communication, and identify leadership skills needed for their year of service. The [University] Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication department regularly uses BASIC to develop teamwork among its student leaders and build relationships among students.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The BASIC program is a unique opportunity for high school FFA officers and members, as well as collegiate and adult teams, to develop positive relationships while learning and growing leadership and team building skills. While the overall participant base is expanding to reach a wider audience, many FFA chapters have yet to take advantage of the BASIC program. Perhaps this is because their chapter officers already experience some training during their summer camp. Some other limiting implications are:

1. Time Constraints - The FFA-FCCLA Center is located in the central section of the state, this results in time away from school (during the week), or family/other activities (on a weekend). While it is not required, it is recommended that students and teachers utilize the overnight accommodations as part of the complete adventure experience.
2. Cost to individual or chapter.
3. Physical Requirements – Students learn through experience and participation in the elements. If a student is not able to physically participate (or chooses not to), it can negatively impact the students' experience and team outcome.
4. Students will also be challenged emotionally to reflect on their feelings. There is the potential for emotions such as fear or insecurity to surface and advisors/facilitators need to be ready to address these emotions in a safe learning environment.
5. Concentrated planning time – Teachers/advisors need to be ready to utilize the energy and awareness generated by the experience and be able to model and apply these principles in the planning time.

Some recommendations for teachers/advisors to help overcome these implications and maximize the BASIC experience include:

1. Schedule BASIC before the school year starts (late summer) as a kick-off activity for your chapter. If chapter officers have already gone through the program, or similar leadership training at camp, allow them to serve as “team leaders”. The program will build momentum and excitement for the upcoming school year, as well as help new students get connected and make friends. Or, invite several neighboring chapters to participate with you as a way to develop positive relationships between schools.
2. Consider asking for BASIC sponsorships from alumni, and then including alumni leaders in the training activities. This will allow students to connect and work with adult community leaders, as well as provide tangible feedback for alumni on how their sponsorship is being invested.
3. Make sure everyone has a role on the team. If a student is unable to participate or feels uncomfortable participating because of a physical impairment, consider creating alternative assignments (like team encourager, timer, or process analyst) that allow them to make a contribution to the team without feeling excluded.
4. Overemphasize positive encouragement and the value of trying new activities, even if students “fail” at the task. Perhaps show a motivation movie clip that illustrates principles of teamwork, dedication, or overcoming obstacles before attending BASIC to help set the context for what students will be experiencing.
5. Include BASIC as one piece in an overall chapter leader development plan. It is important to remember that leadership development is process (Maxwell, 2002), not a one-time event. How the principles and practices learned during BASIC are applied and reinforced over the following weeks and months is equally important in the participants’ overall leadership development.

References

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