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Gauging Interest: BAS/IPS Student Collaboration Group

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Author Note

The content of this paper is done so in affiliation with Boise State University, specifically within the Department of Interdisciplinary Professional Studies.

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Abstract

An initiative to launch a student-led collaboration group within the BAS/IPS program aimed to provide valuable feedback to the program's directors was recently put into place. To launch this new initiative in the intended Fall 2023 semester, the program's directors require vital information from prospective students. This paper is an overview of the approach taken to understand why or why not students would be interested in participating in a student-led group that would benefit the program they are enrolled in. A survey was sent intended to provide responses with valuable feedback to the decision-makers regarding the new student collaboration group. The results of the survey are included.

Keywords: Student-led, Collaboration, Interest Survey, Feedback, Gauging Interest

Introduction

Several aspects have contributed to my enlightening, edifying, and wonderful experience as a student at Boise State University. One is the value that faculty and staff in the Interdisciplinary Profession Studies (IPS)/Bachelor of Applied Science (/BAS) programs place on the student's perspective regarding program-specific initiatives and concepts. That is why I wanted to ensure that the idea of having a student collaboration group, or advisory committee, in the program continued to move forward as my capstone project. Last year, a student successfully conceptualized the initiative and presented it to faculty and staff as her capstone project. "The committee will serve as a focus group tasked with providing valuable feedback and thoughtful discussion around program initiatives based on the student experience to enhance and explore current and existing program offerings in an effort to remain relevant, innovative, and dynamic in our course of study." (Henry, Serena 2022) Because I feel strongly that a student-led group of this kind would provide significant value to the program, I accepted the challenge to lead the next step. My focus became, "How might I make current BAS/IPS students aware of and recruit excellent candidates for the new student collaboration group, which is intended to be implemented for the Fall 2023 semester?" My goal was to gauge student interest, gain insight into their perspective, provide the results to those making final decisions, and attempt to recruit members for the first official collaboration group (yet to be named) in the BAS/IPS program.

Elements coming together

Innovative Approach

Of course, it was essential to keep the main stakeholders, IPS/BAS faculty and students, in mind while carrying out my capstone project. But in the beginning, it was vital for me to first depend on the perspectives and viewpoints of the directors of the program to move forward by

providing any information regarding the initiative to the students. I regularly met with assistant director Alexis Kenyon for guidance and insight. Her enthusiasm for the initiative influenced my own in coming up with my next steps. She also helped tremendously by reassuring me when I was unsure and anxious regarding how I was carrying out my responsibilities. I gained valuable perspective by meeting with the director of the program, Jon Schneider, to understand his viewpoints and how he envisions a student collaboration group of sorts to be implemented. Both Alexis and Jon validated my pursuits when determining the manner in which I would measure student interest.

I approached my work with a good understanding of the BAS/IPS program directors' vision of the purpose of a student collaboration group. However, some details are yet to be determined regarding the logistics of the initiative, which prevented me from educating students about the logistics of the group. One reason is that the directors needed a better understanding of why or why not the students would be interested in participating in such a group and the details surrounding it. So it was important for me to come up with an idea to successfully attain valuable feedback from the students in the program so critical decisions could be made easier.

Emotional Intelligence

I referred to what I learned in IPS 375 Perspective Taking when deciding what to do next while carrying out my project. By prioritizing emotional intelligence, specifically utilizing the steps shown in the PAUSE model (Ross, Harvey 2020) when deciding my next step, I ensured that I always had the stakeholders at the forefront of my mind. Howard J Ross believes that practicing the PAUSE model gives us the opportunity to evaluate the circumstances we are in. (Ross, Harvey 2020)

P - Pay Attention

A - Acknowledge your assumption

U - Understand your perspective
S - Seek different perspectives
E - Examine your options

By using the PAUSE model, I was successful when deciding the best platform to use and questions to ask in order to provide feedback that would best benefit the BAS/IPS program. Furthermore, since the faculty and staff prioritize using a high level of emotional intelligence in order to best serve their constituents, my probability for success was very high.

Creative Thinking

When it came time to determine what kind of students' responses would best benefit those making future decisions regarding the initiative, I referred to the creative thinking skills I learned in IPS 385 Asking Questions and Framing Problems. According to W. Wallas, there are four stages in the creative process; preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. (Wallas, W. 1946) Because I could recall the clarity that I received regarding how effective the incubation phase was for me upon learning about it, I relied on it heavily. Removing myself from my train of thought when feeling stuck allowed me to later come up with questions to ask students that would provide important insight into their specific needs and the barriers they face.

Innovative Solution

To understand what motivates students to want to be part of a collaboration group and what deters them, I constructed a survey specifically designed to do so. I also asked former students to participate as if they were still in the program because they could offer valuable insight after going through it. Rather than asking "yes or no" type questions, which typically do not offer needed insight, I tried a different approach that provided the intended results. Questions asking for specifics, such as, "In the end, what would make an opportunity to be in a student-led group like this worth it for you?" Another example is if the student responded that they were not

interested, that was followed up with “Is there anything that would change your mind?”

Responses received provided valuable feedback that will help the program directors when making decisions. One example of a helpful response an anonymous student provided when asked what would make this initiative worth it was, “Either academic credit or the potential to make real change. (or both)”

Results

In total, I received 29 responses to the interest survey. Of those responses, 63% were from students who will either graduate before the Fall 2023 semester or have already completed the program. The remaining 27% were responses from students that will be enrolled in the Fall 2023 semester. In the survey, students were asked if they ever had ideas that they felt might benefit the BAS/IPS program. Of the 27% of students planning to be enrolled in Fall 2023, 10% claimed they did not have any ideas. Whereas 80% said they could conjure some, and 10% said they already have ideas. Although those results sound promising, further questioning provided more insight regarding their willingness to participate in the initiative. Even though 90% of students that will be enrolled this Fall claim to be able to come up with helpful ideas in the program, 40% are not interested in participating. Fifty percent are willing but claimed that meeting every week would add too much to their plate. The remaining 10% were willing to participate without hesitation. Of the students who showed any interest, half of them wanted information when the new program was ready to be launched. The other half provided their names in order to be included in the details up until the launch, showing a strong desire to be a part of the first BAS/IPS student collaboration group.

The impact this project has had on stakeholders can be measured by their feedback. Upon learning about it, students provided a variety of comments proving their enthusiasm for the

project. Some of the student's quotes that were shared anonymously when asked what would make this worth it were:

“Being able to collaborate and offer valuable ideas that could lead to a better student experience.”

“It would be valuable in my studies in leadership and collaboration/communication, as well as learning from great leaders on how to conduct something like this one day. I also think it would grow motivation in my studies.”

“To feel heard and to see our suggestions incorporated into the program.”

When asked how the student responses will benefit the decision-making process, assistant director of the BAS/IPS program Alexis Kenyon said, “The group will provide valuable feedback from our most important stakeholders. Identifying who is willing to help us with this important work is essential to creating a very needed feedback loop.”

Conclusion

When I was presented with this capstone project opportunity, the vision, timeline, and some details differed from the outcome. The goals set at the beginning of the project included educating current students about all of the details, creating an application for the collaboration group, and getting a solid commitment from several students for Fall 2023. Although I could not accomplish what I originally intended, I drew from both past experience and what I have learned in my formal education when bumps in the road arose. Over and over again, life experience has taught me that flexibility is crucial. This is especially true when leading a project. Although “trust the process” is my mantra, in IPS 410, I learned about the important practice of *challenging* the process when it's required. “Leaders that “Challenge the Process” seek innovative ways to change, grow and improve. They identify processes that do not work, and take action to fix it.” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) I am pleased with the overall outcome of my capstone project. The only thing I would do differently is reiterate to myself from the beginning

that sometimes challenges teach us the most if we accept them with an open mind, humility, and a willingness to learn. “Sometimes challenges find leaders, and sometimes leaders find challenges; most often it’s a little of each.” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017)

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