

PROGRAM:

Parent Academy Path to Financial Aid, GEAR UP Parent Development Course

OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of the training is to provide a diverse minority group of parents with information that would help them understand the requirements their children encounter in seeking to gain admission to post-secondary education. The class is an Advanced Module offered to all Parent Academy graduates.

LOCATION:

Parent Academy evening class sessions were located at Heritage University, Toppenish, Washington from 4:30-8:30 p.m. on three separate evenings.

DESCRIPTION:

Three, four-hour classes were taught to a group of mostly Latino parents. They were taught why the ten most common excuses for not going to college, including “Nobody in my family has ever gone to college before” and “I can’t afford it,” are wrong. They learned about the five critical factors in determining four-year college entrance, including grades, high school level coursework, extracurricular activities, community service experiences, admissions essay writing, and teacher recommendations. The participants learned about high school course requirements for college admissions, The Husky Promise, FAFSA, Pell Grants, Students Loans, where to find scholarships, the significance of official transcripts, how to make a scholarship application, and what grade point average (GPA) means. They also received information about Trade School and Vocational Student funding.

Parent Academy Directors, Dori Peralta Baker, Lorena Silva and Andy Pascua directed the first session. Each participant was provided with writing materials and a binder containing information about the three course sessions. For better communication, an interpreter was present; parents were given headsets and encouraged to speak in the language most comfortable for them. The interpreter then switched between Spanish and English.

The directors focused the first hour on the goals and objectives of the Parent Academy, scholarships, the process of receiving Financial Aid and how to share the information learned in the class with other parents. It was important that empowered parents were a source of information about Financial Aid for other parents, and that the protocol to refer parents to specific college Financial Aid personnel be established.

Monica Medrano, GEAR UP Site Coordinator for Wapato Middle School, spoke about how she prepared to attend college as a high school student and eventually went to college. Monica discussed how her parents were involved in the process of encouraging her and preparing her to apply for college. She stated that they encouraged her to do extracurricular and school activities, monitored her studies and encouraged her to do well in her classes.

Monica talked about the importance of parents communicating with their children, finding out what their children like and dislike, guiding them in a positive manner, and directing them towards academic achievement and college.

Participants were then given the opportunity to express an interest in what they wanted to learn in the upcoming class sessions of the course. The participants were interested in learning about the following topics:

1. What to look for and how grades determine the college admissions chances of their children.
2. How to effectively communicate with schools.
3. What is community involvement, and how does this activity affect the admission of students to college?
4. Different learning styles of children. For example, some learn more readily with visual information.

Dori addressed some of the interests mentioned by the course participants and then introduced **Financial Aid Part 1**. She discussed the Husky Promise, High School Core and Advanced Placement Courses, and Communications with School Counselors. 3-hole punched handouts for inclusion in the parents' Financial Aid binders were distributed. Junior and Senior high school students attending the class with their parents, created an informal forum to answer questions parents had on the FAFSA website, student portfolio contents, scholarship application essays and examples of student community service projects.

James Rigney, retired high school teacher, counselor, and education advocate, introduced the second session, **Financial Aid Part 2**. Mr. Rigney discussed, "How and What Can You Learn to Share with Parents," and Dori discussed the role of "Being UW GEAR UP Parent Ambassadors." *Rafael Villalobos, Jr., CWU Educational Recruiter, introduced Financial Aid Part 3*. Mr. Villalobos discussed FAFSA, Pell Grants, student loans, tests, application deadlines, grade point averages, and school, university and college requirements. Dori and Lorena introduced information about funding and discussed scholarship websites for Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Undocumented Persons. Several parents brought their middle school and high school-age children with them because they felt that they needed to hear the materials presented first-hand. Three seniors attended who did not know about FAFSA or the FAFSA deadline of February 29.

In the final session, Rafael Villalobos taught **Financial Aid Part 4**, Scholarship Search: Public and Private Scholarships, from 4:30-6:00 p.m. He provided application packages to the course participants, and produced a sample application during the class session. Mr. Villalobos ended the session with the last segment of the training, **Financial Aid Part 5**, with information about internships, paying back loans, organizational skills, and timelines.

Participants were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire. This was followed by a "graduation ceremony" conducted by UW GEAR UP Director Loueta Johnson and Assistant Director Andy Pascua, who congratulated the class on completing the course, handed out Certificates of Course Completion, followed by a group photo.

A plan was put in place to recruit these graduates of the Parent Academy for future events and training, and as Parent Academy Graduate volunteers.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE:

PREPARATION ACTIVITIES:

University of Washington GEAR UP, Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity staff members, parents and Site Coordinators participated in a GEAR UP Parent Involvement Summit Conference in August 2008. The Parent Academy Path to Financial Aid program evolved from the conference as a major priority for the Parent Academy Advanced Modules for 2009. The Financial Aid Advanced Module would be offered to all parents who graduated from one of the four Parent Academies. Besides planning to serve a large Latino population, during the training the program planners decided to recognize other local cultures such as Filipino, Native American, Japanese and Hawaiian cultures to enhance and bring even more recognition and cultural diversity to the GEAR UP 4 Families Programs.

The instructional model requires organizers who have a deep understanding of the communities they work with. In order to recruit successfully, the program organizers need to contact community leaders and volunteers, GEAR UP Program school staff and special interest groups to build a community education program promoting parent involvement. The training materials for this program are readily available from UW GEAR UP, but not so easily gained is the cultural understanding that the organizers of the Parent Academy brought to program. Newcomers to communities who want to implement this model would be well advised to intensely study the socio-cultural environment they are working in for at least a few months before attempting to organize a Parent Academy. New community organizers should set-up committees of experienced community leaders and volunteers to advise them in this process.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

A brief, seven-item questionnaire was administered to participants in the final session to evaluate and comment on the course. The questionnaire included following questions:

1. Was the class offered at a good time for you?
2. Should GEAR UP students attend this class?
3. Did you enjoy the presenters and the information they gave out?
Other Presentation Topics for this class _____
4. Did you find the handout information helpful? Was your Financial Aid binder useful?
5. Did you share information with your students? Did they ask you questions?
6. Did you share information with other parents? Did they ask questions?
7. Do you feel you need to learn more?

As staff debriefed the workshops it was decided that Parent Academy classes should be held at community centers, churches, and other places where parents and families gather, and it was agreed that in future the *Parent Advanced Module Classes* would be identified as *GEAR UP Parent Development Classes*.

Every item in the curriculum could then be expanded through Parent Academy Workshops that would cover specific areas of learning within the Financial Aid Course. Not all Parent Academy graduates were able to attend this course and the workshops could enhance their knowledge as well.

COSTS OR COST CONSIDERATIONS:

The major cost considerations are:

- a.) If serving a cohort with multiple languages, interpreter services for simultaneous interpretation would be needed. Translation of printed material is also necessary.
- b.) Reimbursement for those who present information about financial aid: Major costs can be avoided by using volunteers, and institutional resources such as college financial advisors.
- c.) Printing cost for the *Parent Academy Path to Financial Aid* program contents and binder.
- d.) Evening refreshments.

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RESOURCES:

Parent Academy Path to Financial Aid (A multi-page binder created by University of Washington GEAR UP)