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Leadership Academy Final Essay

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For my leadership project, I set out to organize a conference presentation practice session. There are not opportunities for graduate students in my department to practice their presentations prior to conferences. Practice can serve both to help those presenting to prepare and to set an example for those in the audience, likely in earlier years of the program. Specifically, I decided to organize a practice session for the National Association of Research in Science Teaching (NARST) conference, because it is a conference that many students attend and one that I am attending and preparing to present at.

In order to plan the practice session, I first talked with my advisor and another professor, who has organized practice sessions in the past. These conversations gave me an idea of what I would need to do. I then chose a date, time, and location. I decided to hold the practice session on the afternoon of March 2. To provide feedback to the presenters, I emailed several professors to see if they would be willing to attend. I found two professors willing to attend; each was able to attend for half of the practice session.

I next advertised the event through emails to several listservs. The emails included a form to complete if one was interested in practicing a presentation. There was the option to present either a paper or a poster. The posters were to be presented using the projector to the whole audience. I decided to make this an option to include as many students as possible. To extend my advertising, I reached out to the CREATE for STEM Institute. They sent an email about the event to their listservs. I also asked if they would provide refreshments for the event and they agreed.

Immediately before the event, I let the presenters know which order they would be presenting in. Unfortunately, I only had three people, including myself, sign up to present. I decided to hold the event anyway as it would be a good opportunity for those who did sign up. I held the event on Friday, March 2. There was one paper presentation and two poster presentations. A professor attended to offer feedback after each presentation. The attendees reported that they appreciated the opportunity to practice and the audience enjoyed the presentations.

From my experience, I learned several things about myself and about leadership. First, I learned about the importance of organization and planning when acting as a leader. As the sole person on my project, I was responsible for each detail. I ended up selecting a date for the event that was not optimal. The date, because of Spring Break, had to be more than a week out from the conference, which was too early for many people to be ready to practice their presentations. I did find value in reaching out for assistance when needed. Whenever I did reach out for help in the process, I received a positive response.

It was challenging to work with others in the coordination of the event, because we had different priorities, particularly in reference to collaborating with the CREATE for STEM Institute. I am grateful for the support the Institute provided. However, it was frequently on a different timeline than my own. From this, I learned the value of emotional intelligence in collaborative relationships.

Finally, I learned the joy that comes with leadership. I was able to successfully plan an event that allowed students to practice their conference presentations. This served a need in my department. I have pride in what I was able to accomplish even though it was small. I am already looking towards next year to organize another conference practice session.