

Honors in Action Project Award (Chi Upsilon Chapter)

Honors In Action Project Award

Provide a brief abstract or summary of your Honors in Action project including the following components: academic research into the Honors Study Topic and analysis, leadership roles, leadership development, action, collaboration, reflection and outcomes.

Our project focused on a video to mentor students by informing and inspiring them about a variety of career opportunities. This video could not have been possible without the collaboration of students, staff, professionals, and teachers in the Ukraine and at our college. After researching mentoring, we realized that our original plan of creating a robust mentoring program at our college was not feasible, but we were able to assist already existing local mentorship programs. Our video reached a wide variety of students, taught our team about mentoring and new technology, and inspired young students to pursue new possibilities.

What theme in the current Honors Program Guide did your chapter focus on?

Theme 7 - Innovation and Replication

Why and by what process did you choose this theme?

As a group, we discussed each theme in the Honors Program Guide, created examples of topics related to each theme, and then split into smaller teams to do preliminary research and present results to the group. We then voted as a chapter to choose the theme that would be most interesting and had the greatest potential for an action-oriented project. The topic of mentoring became our focus because our college was starting new mentoring programs; our students were interesting in serving as mentors and already mentored on some occasions; innovative approaches would be needed to reach under-privileged students; and the opportunities to make a direct, personal, and meaningful difference were compelling.

List the 8 academic/expert sources that were most enlightening regarding multiple perspectives of the Honors Study Topic theme you selected. Briefly explain why these were the most important sources and what you learned from each of them as you researched your theme.

[More Information](#)

* Resource 1

Bridgeland, John and Bruce, Mary. "The Mentoring Effect: Young People's Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring," Mentor: The National Mentoring Partnership, January 2014.

This report discusses how a mentoring program can and will work, including who isn't reached and why, finding those gaps, and reaching those students. At-risk youth are less likely to have a "naturally occurring mentor."

Resource 2

Hoffmire, John. "To break the chains of poverty, we must take mentoring seriously," Deseret News Opinion, 13 October 2014. This article discusses the poverty gap and mentoring as a way to break that gap, which improves educational and employment opportunities.

Resource 3

"How to be an Effective Mentor," Building Effective Mentoring Partnerships, 2009, <http://www.pcaddick.com/page7.html>
This extensive mentoring guide lists the different types and qualities of mentors. Authors emphasize that mentees need to learn from their own experiences, not from the mentor's experiences. Mentors need to avoid criticizing, giving advice, and rescuing the mentee.

Resource 4

Jones, Andrew. "Coaching v mentoring: what works best for teachers?" The Guardian, 5 August 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/aug/05/coaching-mentoring-teachers-professional-development>

A coach will do whatever it takes to help students be successful: traditional tutoring, time management, support replacing lack of familial support, and economic assistance. Our chapter compared mentoring to roles from parenting to college roommate, learning about numerous types of mentors.

Resource 5

Kowal, Cindy. "Using College Students as Mentors and Tutors: A Robert H.B. Baldwin Fellowship Report," Communities in Schools, 2009.

This particular study touched on a point that we didn't even consider: creating a mentoring program for our project would probably not be the best course of action, as an effective mentoring program needs at least eighteen months of interaction to be effective. Mentoring is intensive and time-consuming, so the two-year college environment is best suited for academic tutoring and short-term enrichment activities, rather than mentoring. This changed the direction of our thinking and project.

Resource 6

Shoenhoft, Susan. Manager of Special Events and Volunteer Coordination, Pioneer Center. Personal interview, 28 September 2017.

The Pioneer Center is a local agency providing services, including mentorship and behavioral health services, to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Ms. Shoenhoft came in to discuss effective fundraising strategies, which are especially critical during the current funding crisis in Illinois.

Resource 7

Trucano, Michael. "Promising uses of technology in education in poor, rural and isolated communities around the world," EduTech: The World Bank, 22 July 2017, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/education-technology-poor-rural>
This article covers educational technology use in low-income communities. Technologies that could help in mentoring don't necessarily have to be high-tech. While technology is important in reaching students all over the world, technology use should be tailored to culture, access, and environment.

Resource 8

Wiley, Karen. Director of Athletics, Intramurals & Recreation, McHenry County College. Personal interview, 9 Nov. 2017. Ms. Wiley visited our chapter to discuss the skills, motivations, and tactics which coaches and peers use in mentoring through difficult situations, including academic and athletic challenges. Ms. Wiley encouraged the chapter to act from the heart and speak up rather than wait for someone else to take action.

What conclusions did your chapter reach based on your research into the Honors Study Topic and how did these conclusions guide you to select the action part of your project?

We concluded that an effective mentoring program is beneficial for the mentor, not just the mentee. They are able to reflect on their own practice, gain peer recognition, develop interpersonal skills, and boost their resume enhancement opportunity. This motivated us to include some mentoring component in our project.

Originally, we hoped to act as mentors on our campus. Our research showed that mentorship can be ineffective without an adequate amount of time to invest in a program. Additionally, since our college had put mentoring programs on hold until a new administrator could be hired in early 2018, we found it impossible to work with our college to improve existing mentorship programs. Once we realized the short time-span of Honors in Action would not allow for such an investment, we concluded that starting a complex mentoring program on our own wasn't feasible. We would need to find an action step that was less obvious.

We studied how technology extends the reach of mentorship by removing physical obstacles such as distance, disability, and scheduling conflicts; we considered how to reach underserved students using technology. Through discussion with a teacher in the Ukraine, we determined that an inspirational video to reach her students would be a good use of technology.

We learned what skills a mentor must possess, such as listening actively, building trust, determining goals, building capacity, encouraging, inspiring, and confronting problematic behaviors. To this end, we made sure our video participants were engaging on camera and enthusiastic about their careers. We also felt that it would be inspiring to feature various student labs around our campus to help our distant mentees see various opportunities that might await them.

We concluded that effective mentoring encompasses both academic and personal growth, balanced for individual student needs. Many students, particularly at-risk students, have never had exposure to mentorship, even on an informal level. Thus, they may need orientation and explanation to benefit from mentoring. Mentor training, which includes best practices and common pitfalls, is also needed. This led us to train each participant in our mentoring video to be sure the presentations were effective.

We learned how Illinois's funding crisis was affecting non-profit agencies in our area, so we decided to include fundraising support for local mentoring agencies in our project.

Overall, all of these conclusions allowed us to steer the action portion of our project away from directly mentoring students. Though creating a mentoring program at our college was infeasible, we made a positive impact by offering support to already established organizations in the community and an overseas school system.

Summarize your objectives for all elements of this Honors in Action project and the process by which the chapter set these objectives.

Our chapter had three objectives: recruit potential mentors by emphasizing personal, professional, and academic benefits of mentoring; fundraise for local mentoring organizations; and inspire underserved communities through a short-term mentoring solution with a technology component. We set these objectives after analyzing our resources and the needs of our college and community.

With whom did you collaborate for this Honors in Action project?

Our chapter reached out to a local mentoring organization, the Pioneer Center. The Manager of Special Events and Volunteer Coordination and our Honors in Action Chair collaborated to host a fundraiser at a local restaurant. This fundraiser included a dine-and-share event and raffle, using gift cards and other prizes collected from local business by chapter members. Serendipitously, a chapter alumna, now an English teacher in Katerinopol, Ukraine, contacted us to ask for help inspiring her students. She shared how her students were uninspired when choosing career paths; living in a high-poverty environment gave them few ideas for possible careers beyond the service, retail, or farming industries. To inspire these students, the chapter created a video where students from our college discussed their future careers and the preliminary college courses required to pursue them. We collaborated with this alumna and an educational technology expert on our campus several times throughout the process to seek input on the structure and content of the video.

Describe the leadership of chapter members that contributed to the planning, preparations, and implementation of this Honors in Action project. The exercise of leadership may come from groups/committees, officers, and non-officers. Leadership roles are not necessarily those that come with "titles."

Throughout the project, a variety of members were given the opportunity to lead. Our chapter's Honors in Action Chair organized action plans, delegated responsibility, updated the chapter on the project at weekly meetings, directed the mentoring video, and coordinated and managed the fundraising project for the Pioneer Center. The chapter's secretary coordinated with our chapter alumna in Ukraine to plan the content of the mentoring video. The secretary also facilitated an interview via Skype in which the chapter sought feedback from the alumna about the format of the video and needs of her particular students. Several members appeared in the video; other members recruited students from outside the chapter to be featured in it. Our chapter's Vice President of Service invited our college's athletic director to speak at a chapter meeting. Several chapter members participated in promoting and hosting the Pioneer Center fundraising event.

Describe leadership education and training activities taken to specifically help chapter members be more effective leaders for this Honors in Action project.

The outgoing officer team trained new officers on the Honors in Action process, encouraging us to break up work to allow many students to serve in leadership roles. Chapter advisors hosted a training session on how to effectively and professionally communicate with individuals and businesses outside the chapter and college. Both a chapter member and an advisor attended Honors Institute, after which they informed the chapter about what they learned in seminars and through interactions with other conference attendees. The chapter reached out to several mentoring organizations in the research stage of the project. From these organizations, such as One Million Degrees and Big Brothers, Big Sisters, the chapter learned what mentoring organizations do, how they work, and what it means to be a mentor. Our contact at the Pioneer Center spoke to us about effective fundraising strategies; at the dine-and-share event, our chapter volunteers received training in how to interact with event attendees with Down Syndrome and how to approach customers to sell raffle tickets. Chapter members attended two on-campus leadership education and training activities focused on how to be an effective mentor. The Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs provided keen insight regarding how to become an effective mentor by offering constant support and reaching out past our comfort zones. He encouraged us to recognize how our own privilege has led us to success; we need to keep this in mind to effectively help others. Additionally, the college's athletics director gave an interactive discussion on how to enhance our leadership skills. She is a well-known coach and mentor to the athletes on campus; for that reason, she was asked in to speak to the chapter. She taught us that we can inspire others with sincerity, empathy, and servant leadership. These presentations taught useful mentoring lessons, which we kept in mind when creating our video.

Describe the service or "action" components of this Honors in Action project that were inspired by and directly connected to your Honors Study Topic research. (Action can also include promoting awareness and advocacy.)

Our first action was to aid in fundraising for the Pioneer Center: the proceeds of a dine and share event went to the center and a raffle featured numerous in-kind donations gathered by chapter members. Chapter members promoted awareness of Down Syndrome through discussions with event attendees.

Our chapter then created a mentoring video for high school age students in Ukraine, which focused on a variety of potential careers, including trades and professional areas. We recruited students from our college to appear in the video, determined the video content, and coached participants on what topics to discuss. The chapter members and other recruited students spoke about their goals, intended careers, and the education they planned to obtain to reach these goals. The video encouraged innovation and encouraged students to reach their full potential on career paths they didn't realize existed before. Through these actions, the chapter used technology to mentor and inspire students whom we will never meet.

What were the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project, including the lessons learned by your chapter members and others?

Through the action steps, the chapter raised a substantial amount of money for organizations involved and had a global outreach. Through the dine-and-share and raffle event, the chapter helped the Pioneer Center raise close to \$250 in one evening. The chapter members talked to restaurant customers who knew very little about Down Syndrome to inform them about it and engaged with event attendees who have Down Syndrome. The night was well received by everyone involved. A resounding thank you email from Ms. Shoenhoft, Manager of Special Events and Volunteer Coordination at the Pioneer Center, stated that, "everyone spoke highly of you and [Phi Theta Kappa]. I really appreciate you." Our chapter was pleased to hear that we could be helpful to this organization.

Our video sent to Ukrainian students was twelve minutes in length and discussed career options from doctor to mechanic. The video reached three different schools in the area, for a total of 108 students. The video was presented in career workshops for groups of thirty-five to forty students ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen years. A follow-up discussion focused on each of the career paths featured in the video: automotive mechanic, lawyer, costume designer, doctor, chemist, restaurant owner, firefighter, and emergency responder. During this discussion, the students were excited to discuss what careers they could have, what skills they would need, and what careers were the most interesting. Their teacher shared with us the impact on students, "I originally only planned to show [the video to] my [own] students, but when the other two schools in town heard about it they asked me to visit and show their students also. The video was a huge success! Even students who typically refuse to participate in English lessons were engaged in our video discussion." The alumna and English teacher sent us a video of parts of these discussions, where one student expressed interest in becoming a doctor, and another a computer programmer. Students were excited to learn about educational opportunities they were never previously exposed to, such as study-abroad programs and academic scholarships. Our alumna contact, the other Ukrainian schools that participated, and the students found the video beneficial.

The video did have an impact on the international level, yet it had just as large an impact on our own campus. We received support from the administration of McHenry County College, which resulted in the video being shown on the college's social media outlets for recruitment and advising.

Chapter members learned numerous lessons from both the international and local aspects of the project. Through presentations by the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs and the athletics director, chapter members learned how to motivate others. We learned that mentoring may seem fairly straight forward, but it is a deep, complex endeavor that requires leadership development.

Through the video sent to the Ukraine, chapter members had the most exposure to the world. The chapter realized that the opportunities that they have been given as students are not available to everyone, even in our own community. There are social barriers, economic factors, and mindsets shaped in childhood that affect students. The world is diverse, and the chapter members learned to look through new lenses and appreciate the opportunities we've been given.

What is left undone or what opportunities remain for the future?

Our chapter is left with two items to finish. One of these is to create a best practices guide for mentorship for our campus. We hope to create a pamphlet that has tips, advice, and quotes from campus mentoring experts. The guide was put on hold because mentorship programs at our school are being reorganized. Additionally, we hope to create some type of informal mentoring program. Our Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs suggested having tables in the cafeteria where our students can meet and help struggling students in a casual and non-threatening atmosphere. We will need to collaborate with other college departments to avoid redundancy.

Opt Out