

## Project Youth Event 2012

### Brief description of program / project:

Project Youth is an annual event put on by the Bennion Center each Spring semester where sixth-grade students from Title I schools in Salt Lake City are brought to campus for a day of college life. This past year the event was held on Thursday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. Students began by attending a pep rally with cheerleaders and guest speakers from campus. Dr. Jennifer Williams Molock, Assistant Vice President for Student Equity and Diversity, spoke about the importance of gaining an education and having a sense of purpose in life. A player from the football team had a related message about working hard in the classroom and respecting our elders.

After the pep rally, the elementary students went to presentations put on by various professors and presenters from many departments across campus. Students went to “classes” in poetry, art, nursing, chemistry, political science, physics and many other subject areas. By having classes in a large variety of subjects we hope to show the students the many possible paths available to them in college. University students volunteered to take the elementary students and their teachers around to the day’s events. By exposing the sixth-grade students to the University atmosphere, we hope to get them excited to pursue a college degree. They can then make college a focus as they move forward through the rest of their education. It is an introduction to college that they may not receive otherwise.

### Who was asked to complete survey:

We asked four groups involved to fill out the surveys: the sixth-grade students attending, their teachers, the University students volunteering and the presenters at each of the classes.

### Respondents:

Students:	378
Teachers:	15
Volunteers:	96
Presenters:	23

**Administration Type:** Paper, with later data entry into Campus Labs.

### Summary of Key Findings:

#### **Students**

The sixth-grade students gave a variety of responses to what they learned in the two classes they each attended. Responses ranged in enthusiasm from “really nothing” to “Poetry rocks!!!!”. When asked if they liked each of their classes (on a scale of 1 to 5) 74.47% chose 4 or 5, and about 8.00% chose 1 with the first class. For the second class, 69.92% chose 4 or 5, and 8.40% chose 1. When asked about what they learned from the volunteers taking them around, the students responded with a variety of things:

- “college is awesome”
- “college can be difficult”
- “doctors go to college for 8 years”
- “How it feels to be a student”
- “how to do teamwork”

In contrast, some also responded “Hardly anything,” “I didn’t learn anything,” and “i forgot.” Funny enough, a couple also mentioned that “I learned that they have to walk a lot.” When asked if they think they will go to college, 69.00% responded 5 (Definitely yes), 11.05% responded 4, 18.87% responded 3 (Maybe) and .81% responded 2 and only one student (.27%) responded 1 (Definitely not). 90.11% of students circled 4 or 5 with the question “How much do you want to go to college?”. 93.82% gave a 4 or 5 when asked how hard they are willing to work to go to college. The discrepancy between the percent that circled 4 or 5 when asked if they think they will go versus the number that want to go is interesting.

### **Teachers**

The students’ teachers also gave some interesting responses. When asked if the classes were educational, 80% of the teachers gave either a 4 or 5 for the first class and then 73.33% gave a 4 or 5 for the second class. When asked if the class was engaging, 73.33% of teachers gave either a 4 or 5 for the first class and 80% gave a 4 or 5 for the second one. 73.33% gave a 4 or 5 in response to the question “Was Project Youth well organized?” For all of the above questions, 20% (or 3 teachers) responded with a 1.

When asked for comments and suggestions some mentioned that lunch was chaotic and that the pep rally was unstructured and “horrible.” However, other teachers also described Project Youth using adjectives like “great” and “wonderful”. One teacher said, “It was awesome! Perfect...” Some suggested:

- “A better sound system so the students can hear the speakers.”
- “Instead of Political Science, a more hands on science or art class”
- Don’t throw out prizes at the assembly
- Don’t promise the kids the chance to meet football players
- “It would be helpful and save time if we could divide our kids beforehand for the volunteers.”

A number of them said that they felt the volunteers should have been trained better and that they should have worn more appropriate clothing (i.e. no short shorts). We also asked them if Project Youth was effective at encouraging their students to seek a college education. Some said that it was too long and uninteresting and that the material was too advanced for the students. One said that “at times kids forgot that they were there to experience campus life.” Another suggested having a survey before and after the event, perhaps to measure its effect on the kids, and another said it would have been great if the students heard more about majors and activities on campus. On the other hand, many teachers said Project Youth was effective at encouraging their students to attend college; one teacher wrote that his/her students “wouldn’t shut up about it. What a blast!”

### **Volunteers**

The University of Utah students that volunteered provided some good feedback as well. They responded pretty positively to the question “Was it engaging, inspirational and educational?” 78.26% responded 4

or 5 for the first class, 81.11% responded 4 or 5 for the second class. When asked if the event was well organized, 93.54% gave a 4 or 5. 93.41% said they would like to participate next year. The volunteers' suggestions were insightful. Quite a few mentioned color coding the sixth graders from each school so that the volunteers can easily distinguish their assigned students. Some also mentioned the garbage and littering problem at lunch time. A few volunteers said that the event should focus more broadly on higher education and not specifically on the U. Other comments included:

- “Dress rehearsal for the Pep Rally”
- “have things to do for the kids should there be any down time”
- Don't hold the pep rally in Libby Gardner Hall
- “keep the schools a little more separated”
- Make the groups smaller
- “the movement between buildings could have been better”
- Tell volunteers more about the event beforehand

Volunteers heard about Project Youth a variety of ways. Many heard about the event from the Bennion Center directly. Others heard from their fraternity or sorority. Many listed either another Bennion Center or University organization as their source of information. Others listed specific people that told them about the service opportunity.

### **Presenters**

While their experience with Project Youth was limited to the class portion of the event, the presenters' responses will be helpful as we try to improve upon that aspect of the event. All presenters gave Project Youth a 4 or 5 for organization. Some did, however, give the program a 3 for preparing the presenters for the day's events. Presenters wrote that they would have liked smaller class sizes. Other responses included:

- 15-20 students would have been better for hands-on activities
- “find out presenter needs in advance”
- “maybe make student volunteers more involved”
- “it would help our dept if there was a small amount of funding available for materials”

Many presenters said that it was well organized and one wrote that the volunteers “followed through beautifully.” One presenter suggested allowing the students to choose what classes they attend. Others suggested talking to more majors, visiting dorms and giving kids drawstring backpacks to take home materials from the day. 95.65% circled 4 or 5 when asked if their volunteer was helpful. 90% gave the program a 4 or 5 when asked if it was effective at encouraging students to attend college.

### **Actions Taken:**

While preparations for next year's event are not in full swing, we will certainly review the responses we received, especially the great suggestions by the teachers, volunteers and presenters. The trick will be to decide which of the suggestions will be feasible within the constraints of the event. It seems that an area where we could improve is in communicating with our presenters, volunteers and teachers beforehand. This may solve other issues with which they voiced concerns.

## **Which department and/or program goals does this program / project align with?**

The mission statement of the Bennion Center:

*The Bennion Center fosters lifelong service and civic participation by engaging the University with the greater community in action, change, and learning.*

Project Youth fulfills many parts of the center's mission statement. By inviting sixth-grade students to campus to get them excited about college, we are participating civically in the community beyond the edge of campus. We are fighting to improve college enrollment rates among students who are not as inclined to go to college. Rather than simply stating a societal problem, Project Youth seeks to change the statistics. We care not only for our own learning but also for the learning and growth of those around us.

## **Which Student Affairs goals does this program / project align with?**

Goals 1, 3 and 5 seem particularly applicable to Project Youth. The event is certainly a leadership opportunity for the students that volunteer and provides them with a learning experience, just as much as it does for the elementary school students that attend. Project Youth also promotes higher education among an underrepresented population. It is about engaging with the broader Salt Lake community and giving back to the city. As we involve professors and students from many departments across campus we are encouraging these separate groups to join together for a common cause. While learning about our separate disciplines is important, we should also be learning the duty we have to use this knowledge to help others and give back to our communities.