Strategies for Success

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ABSTRACT

The physical and biological sciences provide a unique platform to attract and retain students interested in medicine, drug development, and basic and applied sciences. At WMU, the development of rational thinking skills and objective analysis of our world and how it works, positions our students to succeed in a competitive environment.

Current WMU students have difficulty envisioning their career path after they graduate from college, yet they have spent years acquiring and developing the tools of success. In order to help our students see the light at the end of the tunnel, a program called “Strategies for Success” was developed. Simply put, recent WMU alumni return to their alma mater and share their life experiences since leaving campus. Typically several alumni from various science-related fields give short, informal powerpoint presentations followed by an open question and answer forum. The experiences they share are heart-warming and engage our current students, showing them that their goals are attainable.

“Strategies for Success” was sponsored by a CAREER grant from the National Science Foundation and by many local companies and individuals.

ACQUISING THE TOOLS OF SUCCESS

From the moment our students step on Western’s campus they unwittingly are gathering tools that lead to successful careers. The wide array of course offerings, internship opportunities, and laboratory experiences with world-class professors gives our students a tremendous advantage. Examples of success stories of WMU students abound and one of them is related below:

• A local high achieving student chooses Western for the following reasons – close proximity, exceptional value, and engagement our current students, showing them that their goals are attainable.

• As a senior, he pursues a degree in both medicine and drug development, and engage our current students, showing them that their goals are attainable.

THE “STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS” EVENT

2006 Participants
• Warran Manyara, WMU ’03, a 3rd year medical student at the University of Minnesota
• Amanda Frick, WMU ’02, employed at Agdia, a manufacturer of agricultural diagnostics
• Alene Haley, WMU ’03, WMU PA-C ’05

2009 Participants
• Ted Hunter, West Indies College ’81, Andrews M.A. ’94, WMU non-degree, 4th year medical student at Wayne State
• Krystal DeClerck, WMU ’03, 4th year dental student at Detroit Mercy
• Emily Yonker, WMU ’03, WMU PA-C ’06
• Michelle Galloway, WMU ’03, 4th year pharmacy student at Ferris State

2012 Participants
• Neil Bizik, WMU ’10, 2nd year MD/PhD at Harvard
• Jamie Johnson, WMU ’07, 4th year medical student at Michigan State
• Joel Parragh, WMU ’07, 4th year veterinary student at Michigan State
• Irene Murunga, WMU ’04, WMU PA-C ’09

OTHER ACTIVITIES SURROUNDING THE EVENT

In 2012 the Lee Honors College co-sponsored the event and a morning breakfast was held to introduce the alumni to other students, faculty, and administrators. The main “Strategies for Success” presentations were held at noon in a public forum to a packed audience. Food and beverages were provided by Bernard Center staff. Bob Miller, Associate Vice President for Community Outreach has provided comments at each of the events. In 2009 roundtable discussions were held by each alum after the event – this was very popular. WMU Careers services and local recruiters have also attended the events.

TELLING THEIR STORIES OF SUCCESS

Students think they must have high grades and just the right experiences to ensure they reach their goals. Nothing could be further from the truth. Students chosen to participate in “Strategies for Success” come from a variety of backgrounds, yet they all share one common trait. WMU helped prepare them for life and they are willing to share their life story with others.

EVALUATION OF THE EVENT

Evaluation forms were completed by almost all of the students attending each event. The data collected on the evaluation forms has not yet been analyzed.

Informally, the responses from students, faculty, and administrators, was extremely positive and the event was very well received. Current students found it very uplifting and encouraging. Faculty members were proud to see students achieving their goals.

PRESS RELEASES

At each event press releases were handled by WMU news. The 2006 and 2009 events had extensive coverage in the Western Herald after the event. The 2012 event was advertised also in the Kalamazoo Gazette, both online and in the newspaper copy. An excerpt from the Western Herald of February 26, 2009 reads

“Students from the sciences were greeted by alumni speakers on Wednesday from various fields in an event to promote careers in the life sciences industry. Co-sponsored by the Department of Biological Sciences and the Department of Chemistry, “Strategies for Success” aimed at showcasing successful alumni to students. The alumnus were there to show and tell their personal experiences in their field and tell students what they need to do to get where they are in their respective fields.”

EXAMPLE OF HANDOUTS GIVEN AT THE EVENT

INNER LEAFLET OF HANDOUT

A roundtable discussion in 2009

Fliers promoting the event

FLIERS PROMOTING THE EVENT

OUTER LEAFLET OF HANDOUT

Alums answer questions in 2012

A career event

THE RESPONSE OF THE AUDIENCE

During the question

After the question

SPONSORS

This event was possible only with cooperation of WMU faculty, staff, current and former students, local companies and generous individuals

DEDICATED TO ALL OF MY STUDENTS

Dr. Downing (right) advises WMU students

WMU students get tips for success

Dr. Rodriguez advises Jamie Johnson

Dr. Downing is a pioneer in the field of medicine and drug development.