

Summary: MPACE (Amrik Johal)

With the UH Faculty and Staff Development Committee's support, I attended the Mountain Pacific Association of Colleges and Employers (MPACE) Conference in Anaheim, California. The purpose of this year's conference was to provide a space for innovative ideas and progressive discussion on the role of career development and job development during a student's collegiate experience. Not only did I have an opportunity to present on a diversity and social justice related issue, but I had the chance to learn from colleagues presenting on the need for in-college skill development for our students, which I can apply directly to my First Year Experience programming here at UHMC.

One direct application that I will be integrating into UHMC's First Year Experience office is with our incoming Men of Color cohort. Employers at the conference presented on the need for greater soft skill development among college students to increase their employability and productivity in the workplace. Hence, in the cohort's summer programs this coming June-August 2016, I will be integrating soft skill IS courses in order to help build the foundation for job success and advancement. Part of this discussion centered around employers' concerns that while students undoubtedly have technical knowledge, many lack the foundational skills required to be successful in the workforce.

I will be sharing with Debbie how we can integrate soft skills into courses for all first year students so that upon graduation they are equipped with the skills to be successful in their work. These soft skills will include: public speaking, critical thinking, team work, working with diverse populations, communication, and leadership/initiative.

On preparing our students to be workforce ready, it is important to note that many employers do not feel like their new hires (out of college) are ready – however, college administrators report that their students are workforce ready. So, it is vital that we begin to develop these core competencies that employers are looking for (soft skills above) and come to agreement on this campus about what is important as we prepare students for post-college success. One initiative I will be considering is a mandatory integration of soft skills, or a stand alone course that helps students develop these skills, in their first year. What is most significant in these courses is if we have student affairs, faculty, and employers teaching the course together. The more of a brand and connection we have with the community and what the employers want, the more we can prepare our students for long-term success.

Furthermore, this conference highlighted the need for more sensitive practices when working with students with disabilities. One common theme was that the majority of students (up to 70%) do not know that they have a disability (non-apparent). Sharing the appropriate resources with all students upon entry their first year can be helpful in ensuring students know what support exists. I will also work with the incoming Counselor for students with disabilities to share what I learned as well as it relates to support students with the job search and application process should they have a disability. I will work with them to ensure we are supporting our community of students with disabilities and providing the necessary accommodations for them to be successful.

Increasingly, there are resources and databases designed to diversify the workplace, ensure workplace productivity, and support job seekers. The Job Accommodation Network (J.A.N.) is one such resource that we can connect our students with know because it provides important resources and information on the rights of people with disabilities as they embark on the job search. Further, I have been given information on companies that have programs to

support students with disabilities get work experience through internships (S.A.P., Microsoft, E&Y, USBLN, Emerging Leaders, Workforce Recruitment Program).

The impact of the conference goes beyond just my work with FYE; my next steps will be to meet with Career Link to discuss some of the career services applications that can be potentially integrated on our campus. Since Career Link is charged with bringing opportunities to our campus and connecting our student body with employers, the information and resources I have gained could be of use to their practice as well.

For the presentation I conducted on LGBTQ students and career development, I had many people coming up to me after the presentation to find out more information, to get more insights from me, and to ask follow-up questions. I consider it a successful presentation; I formatted it as a discussion so that corporations and campuses could collaborate and come up with best practices for supporting our diverse student bodies. The survey results are yet to be released to presenters but I am confident each attendee left my presentation with new insights or valuable information.