

D.I.N.E. – Diversity and Inclusion Networking Exchange

Summary

On Tuesday, October 25, 2016 the fourth annual D.I.N.E. was held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the Illini Union from 5:30-7:30pm and united 19 employers and 48 students. The program was designed to allow students to engage with employers who value diversity in the workplace and practice networking skills with company representatives in a casual setting. In addition, students had the opportunity to dialogue with employers regarding companies' diverse hiring practices and what qualities they look for in potential candidates. At the beginning of the event each employer was assigned to a numbered table. When the students checked into the event they were assigned a table on a first come first serve basis. The students were welcomed by a keynote address from Melanie Munoz, Diversity Consultant with the Kaleidoscope Group. After the keynote, the students were invited to begin networking with the employers at their table with structured questions developed by the D.I.N.E. committee. The employer questions were designed to help students understand the employer hiring perspective and the student questions were designed to help employers understand the student job search perspective. After 10 minutes of discussion per question, students were asked to rotate clockwise to the next employer table. The following are the list of questions for the structured networking portion of the event:

Student Questions to Employers

- What is a good way to initiate a conversation with a potential employer or professional connection?
- How can I demonstrate the strengths of my social identities and life experiences during an internship or job interview?
- How does your organization recruit diverse talent?
- What are some ways that your company helps diverse employees acclimate to your organizational culture?
- What other policies or practices might an organization have to promote inclusion?
- During an internship or job search, what should a student look for to determine whether or not an organization is a socially just or an inclusive work environment?

Employer Questions to Students

- What motivated you to pursue your chosen academic or career path?
- What are your strengths for a potential organization?
- What are you looking for in your first internship or job?
- What could set my organization apart from others that you are considering?
- What factors do you look for in the decision of which organization to choose for an internship or job?
- How could our organization support you better in your transition into our organization?

At the end of the event there was a chance for open networking between all students and employers in attendance. Students were given the following prompts of sample networking questions:

- What is the culture of your organization?
- What opportunities exist within your organization to participate in community outreach/engagement?
- What kind of employees thrive in your organization?
- What are the company's values and ethics?
- What types of professional development opportunities exist for your employees?
- What are the major issues this organization and industry currently face?
- What was your career path? What advice do you have for students just entering your industry?

Students applauded this event as a mechanism of empowerment stating that they gained,

“A better understanding of how companies utilize diversity to foster growth and the importance of it. Possible job opportunities related to diversity.”

“What does it look like to work with employers who value diversity and how can diversity make a difference.”

“More confident networking with employers.”

Prior to the start of the event students were asked to complete a pre-event survey of their current knowledge and comfort level on the topics of the day. 40.0% of the participants stated that this was their first time attending a networking event. After just one evening of networking with employers at D.I.N.E., students expressed considerable gains in self-efficacy for engaging networking situations.

On post-event surveys, attendees reported increased comfort levels with 4 out of 4 domains measured: initiating networking relationships, understanding the value of networking, understanding the qualities employers seek, and confidence in their ability to ask organizations questions regarding their diversity and inclusion practices. These gains demonstrate meaningful progress on tasks related to perceived career readiness, and provide insights into areas to address in future career and networking development programs.

The sponsors of this event were the Career Services Network, Office of Minority Student Affairs, and the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations.

Overview

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Strengths

- Collaborated with Employer Spotlight
- The variety of employers that attend the event
- Distributing pre-event surveys at check-in yielded a high initial response rate
- Distributing post-event surveys to students during wrap-up announcements provided ample time to complete surveys
- Student satisfaction is evident in the survey findings
- Student learning outcomes outlined in the goals and objectives were met
- Students commented that they liked how this event “warmed them up” for the career fair tomorrow
- Addition of photos and the photo release signage

Weaknesses

- Attrition in attendance between registration and the day of event was greater than expected; we had 70 students register for the event, and 48 students come to the actual event
- Employers mentioned feeling a bit rushed with the questions and requested additional time

- Moving the event to the Fall semester seemed to have a negative impact on attendance

Threats

- Students may feel intimidated by the nature of the event and may not understand the expectations

Opportunities

- On Campus Collaborators
 - Charge sponsors with appropriate outreach responsibilities and ask for sponsors and/or committee members to sign responsibility contracts
- Student Recruitment
 - Partner with United Greek Counsel to drive-up attendance – see if it can be a mandatory service event for Greeks

Student Demographics

- Of those responding to the survey, 56.3% of participants identified as female and 27.17% as male. There were 3 freshmen, 11 sophomores, 15 juniors, 7 seniors and 7 graduate students. Students came from ACES (4), Applied Health Sciences (1), Business (7), Division of General Studies (1), Education (2), Engineering (5), Fine and Applied Arts (1), Liberal Arts and Sciences (17) and one of the Graduate or Schools on campus (1).
- Racial/ethnic identity indicates that 43.8% Asian, 25.0% Black/African American, 8.3% Hispanic/Latino, 8.3% White, and 2.1% Multiracial.

Additional Findings

Within their surveys, students had an opportunity to reflect on the most valuable thing that they learned from D.I.N.E. Many students mentioned the importance of diversity in the workplace – “A better understanding of how companies utilize diversity to foster growth and the importance of it. Possible job opportunities related to diversity.” Other students discussed the level of increased confidence they felt in relationship to networking, “Being comfortable talking to recruiters” and “More comfortable in networking/interviews.”

Intended Outcomes and Results

Goal: Improve perceived career readiness

Objective: Students will gain career preparation knowledge and confidence

Results: To assess changes in perceptions of career readiness, we developed a pre- and post-event survey that included the following five learning outcomes prompts.

1. I feel comfortable initiating networking relationships.
2. I understand the value of networking
3. I understand the qualities employers seek
4. I feel comfortable asking employers questions regarding their organization’s diversity and inclusion practices

Student responses were connected between the pre- and post-event surveys with unique identifiers, so that paired samples *t*-tests could be run to examine differences between the two survey times. Results of these tests can be seen in the table in Appendix A. Statistically significant findings were found for three of four learning outcomes statements. Following the event, participants expressed:

- Greater comfort initiating networking relationships
(↑ from an average score of 3.65 to 4.3 on a 5.0 scale)

- Understand the value of networking
(↑ from an average score of 4.56 to 4.76 on a 5.0 scale)
- Understand the qualities that employers seek
(↑ from an average score of 3.51 to 4.21 on a 5.0 scale)
- Feel comfortable asking employers questions regarding their organization’s diversity and inclusion practices
(↑ from an average score of 3.65 to 4.28 on a 5.0 scale)

These gains demonstrate meaningful progress on tasks related to perceived career readiness, and provide insights into areas to address in future career development programs.

Appendix A:

Descriptive Statistics and Paired-Samples *t*-test Results for Learning Outcomes Pretest and Posttest Items

Outcome†	Pretest		Posttest		<i>n</i>	95% CI for Mean Difference		<i>t</i>	DF	<i>p</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>							
Comfortable	3.57	1.03	4.29	0.65	28	0.383	1.046	4.42	27	<.0001	***
Networking	4.63	0.56	4.78	0.42	27	0.005	0.291	2.12	26	=.0431	***
Employer Qualities	3.48	0.56	4.78	0.42	27	0.506	0.976	6.47	26	<.0001	***
Diversity & Inclusion Practices	3.52	1.18	4.26	0.65	27	0.367	1.114	4.07	26	=.004	***

*** $p < .001$ Note, 43 people filled out the pre survey, 29 filled out the post-survey; for a 67% response rate

- † Comfortable = I feel comfortable initiating networking relationships
- Networking = I understand the value of networking
- Employer Qualities = I understand what qualities employers seek
- Diversity & Inclusion Practices = I feel comfortable asking employers questions regarding their organization’s diversity and inclusion practices