

Conexiones: Latino/a Student and Alumni Networking Event

Summary

On Saturday, April 2, 2016 the third Conexiones Latino/a Student and Alumni Networking Event was held at the University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign in the Illini Ballroom from noon to 4pm and united 11 alumni/professionals and 47 students. This year's program was completely revamped to focus on networking skills and allowing students to interact with professionals in general and not limited to only alumni professionals. This year, we added a keynote speaker, and 2 panel discussions which included 5 professionals on each panel. Our keynote speaker spoke for nearly 30 minutes to start the program while lunch was provided and she discussed her career path and different obstacles she overcame. Students and professionals then went into a mini workshop where they were asked to build and perfect their elevator pitch which is a formal introduction of one's self for a professional setting. This allowed students to get one-on-one feedback from a professional on their elevator pitch. The program then broke out into two panel sessions where students received the opportunity to hear from ten panelists from a variety of career and educational backgrounds. One panel focused on the importance of networking and joining professional organizations once you have entered your career field and the other panel discussed the initial interview process as well as how to prepare for interview questions. Immediately following the panel sessions, professionals and students had the opportunity for *open networking* allowing for student to approach any professional with questions they have as well as allowing for the exchange of contact information. All but one participant reported speaking with alumni, with 35% of students reporting speaking with 2 or more alumni at the event.

Students applauded this event as a mechanism of empowerment stating,

"I learned how having connections with others can help you with obtaining a job also being straight forward with what you want and not be afraid to speak up."

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. One third of the participants stated that this was their first time attending a networking event. After just one afternoon of networking at the Conexiones Latino Student and Alumni Networking Event, students made considerable gains in self-efficacy for engaging networking situations.

On post-event surveys, attendees reported increased comfort levels with all domains measured including: initiating networking relationships and confidence in their ability to create meaningful connections with University of Illinois alumni and other Latino/a professionals. 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.

Overall the event was moving and inspirational to all that attended, 80% of students recommended it at the highest "extremely likely level" with 17% indicating "8" or "9". We sincerely thank all of the students who came out to the event and the dedicated alumni/professionals, most of whom drove from the Chicago area to support our students.

The sponsors of this event were The Career Center, La Casa Cultural Latina, UI Latina/Latino Alumni Association, Mexican Student Association, Illini Bookstore, and Chipotle.

Overview

The third annual Conexiones: Latino/a Student and Alumni Networking Event held on April 2nd at the Illini Union Ballroom was a successful event that united 11 alumni/professionals and 47 students.

Strengths

- Opening up the event to any Latino(a) professional and not limiting ourselves to alumni only, helped with getting a variety of professionals for the event
- The variety of professionals that attend the event – a health professional, entrepreneurs, and a career coach to name a few
- Many of the professionals were local which helped with professionals attending the event and limiting panelist's travel time
- The organization of the event and transition from one topic to another flowed in a timely and appropriate fashion
- The addition of a Keynote Speaker allowed for this event to have a more formalized atmosphere
- Adding in 2 different panel sessions allow students a more intimate environment for students to ask questions
- The programs for the event provided relevant information and were referred to throughout the event
- Supplying pens and note pads at the tables were a necessary component to allow participants to take notes
- 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
- Created an RSO competition to drive in the most students, winning RSO will receive a free pizza party
- Student satisfaction is evident in the survey findings
- Student learning outcomes outlined in the goals and objectives were met
- Partnering with the Mexican Student Association and working with the advisor of the group enhanced cost-effectiveness as the venue was obtained free of cost

Weaknesses

- Attrition in attendance between registration and the day of event was greater than expected; we had 113 students register for the event, and 47 students come to the actual event
- Not all co-sponsors were able to volunteer their time to help out with logistics and were not able to get a panelist member

Threats

- Date posed a risk for student attendance since the event was on a Saturday but also there were several competing programs directed towards Latino students sponsored by La Casa
- Students may feel intimidated by the nature of the event and may not understand the expectations
- Working with a student registered organization will require additional attention to funding sources in the future if needed, working with the on-campus advisor is in the best interest of all parties

Opportunities

- Invited Guests
 - Include a graduate student on next year's panel
 - Many students requested a greater number/diversity of professionals and more free networking time
- On Campus Collaborators
 - Charge sponsors with appropriate outreach responsibilities and ask for sponsors and/or committee members to sign responsibility contracts
 - Partner with another Career Service Unit from campus and have the keynote speaker from that field
 - Partner with new units such as College of Business, College of Medicine, College of Arts and Sciences Latino/a Studies, Illinois Leadership Center, OMSA, SORP to recruitment student and alumni interests
- Student Recruitment
 - Partner with LCASO (United Greek Counsel) OR a Latino(a) Greek house to drive-up attendance – see if it can be a mandatory service event for Latino(a) Greeks
- Compile all LinkedIn profiles into Live binder or some other online source to allow all participants to review one another's profiles prior to the event, this will also help alumni and other students become excited about the event or create a face book event
- Create a session on financial education in relation to unpaid internships or other opportunities
- Consider changing the day of the event from Saturday to a week day evening
- Consider hosting an alumni breakfast the morning of or dinner the night before

Student Demographics:

- 90% of participants identified as female and 10% as male. There were 6 freshmen, 10 sophomores, 11 juniors, 12 seniors and 1 graduate student. Students came from ACES (5), Applied Health Sciences (5), Business (2), College of Media (1), College of education (1), Division of General Studies (4), Fine and Applied Arts (3) and Liberal Arts and Sciences (18). There were no international students present. Ninety percent of students identified as Hispanic/Latino(a); 5% identified as multi-racial.
- Class year information indicates that 17% of freshmen, 19% of sophomores, 24% of juniors and 30% of seniors, 2% of graduate students and 8% unidentified who registered attended in person and filled out a survey.

Additional Findings:

Within their surveys, students had an opportunity to reflect on the most valuable thing that they learned from their Conexiones experience. Many students who responded identified specific skills that they learned more about or had an opportunity to practice, such as interviewing skills, elevator speeches, networking, and connecting with people – “Networking is about creating bonds, and it is about being yourself not selling yourself” Other students discussed the importance of stepping outside your comfort zone, and learning persistence, “I need to be comfortable being uncomfortable. Stepping out of my comfort zone” because taking action can open unexpected doors. Another theme in students' comments related to the importance and ubiquity of networking (“Network with all kinds of people not just people that are in your own field”) as a powerful tool for career development. Finally, students reflected on the empowering nature of this event that was targeted toward students of their

cultural group and being inspired by the professionals' "stories and experiences." "It is okay to not find your perfect career right away- time and patience is key."

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 know how to structure an elevator speech.
3. I can create meaningful connections with alumni and professionals.
4. I can confidently respond to interview questions.
5. I have reflected on how my past experiences can shape my future career goals.

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 four of five learning outcomes statements. Following the event, participants expressed:

- Greater comfort initiating networking relationships (↑ from an average score of 3.31 to 4.10 on a 5.0 scale)
- Increased knowledge of how to structure an elevator speech (↑ from an average score of 2.62 to 4.28 on a 5.0 scale)
- Increased ability to create meaningful connections with University of Illinois alumni and professionals (↑ from an average score of 3.34 to 4.07 on a 5.0 scale)
- Increased knowledge of how to confidently respond to interview questions (↑ from an average score of 3.34 to 3.93 on a 5.0 scale)
- Increased reflection on how my past experiences can shape my future career goals (not statistically significant) (↑ from an average score of 4.07 to 4.26 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.

Goal: Students will exchange contact information with at least 3 alumni or professionals

Objective: Create meaningful connections between students and alumni

Results: Eighteen students did not respond to the survey question about exchanging networking cards. Three participating students (7%) attained this goal, reporting that they exchanged networking cards with 3 or more alumni. The majority of students (30%) reported that they exchanged contact cards with 1 professional. While fewer students attained this particular goal of exchanging contact information, survey data demonstrated that students were still gaining experience interacting with alumni during the event. Ninety seven percent of student participants who answered the question reported speaking with alumni.

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 | | <i>t</i> | DF | <i>p</i> | |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------------|-------|----------|----|----------|------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | Difference | | | | | |
| Comfortable | 3.31 | 0.81 | 4.10 | 0.56 | 29 | 0.482 | 1.104 | 5.22 | 28 | <.001 | *** |
| Elevator | 2.62 | 1.29 | 4.28 | 0.70 | 29 | 1.154 | 2.156 | 6.77 | 28 | <.001 | *** |
| Meaningful Connections | 3.34 | 0.77 | 4.07 | 0.59 | 29 | 0.373 | 1.075 | 4.23 | 28 | <.001 | *** |
| Interview | 3.34 | 1.05 | 3.93 | 0.70 | 29 | 0.149 | 1.024 | 2.75 | 28 | .010 | * |
| Reflect | 4.07 | 0.68 | 4.26 | 0.66 | 27 | -0.084 | 0.455 | 1.41 | 26 | .170 | n.s. |

* *p* < .05, *** *p* < .001

Note, 42 people filled out the pre survey, 30 filled out the post-survey

† Comfortable = I feel comfortable initiating networking relationships.

Elevator = I know how to structure an elevator speech.

Meaningful Connect = I can create meaningful connections with alumni and professionals.

Interview = I can confidently respond to interview questions.

Reflect = I have reflected on how my past experiences can shape my future career goals..

Appendix B:

Event Outline

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|---------------|---|
| 12:00pm | Student Check-in and Lunch (Pre-Surveys distributed) |
| 12:15 – 12:20 | Welcome and Overview for all |
| 12:20 – 12:40 | Keynote Speaker: Angelica Sanchez, Multimedia Reporter FOX News at Nine |
| 12:40 – 12:50 | Elevator Speech Mini Presentation |
| 12:50 – 1:10 | Elevator Speech Exercise with Undergraduates |
| 1:10 – 1:20 | Break |
| 1:20 – 2:10 | Panel and Q&A Session #1 |
| 2:10 – 3:00 | Panel and Q&A Session #2 |
| 3:00 – 3:40 | Open Networking |
| 3:40 – 3:45 | Announcements (Post-Surveys) |
| 3:45 – 4:00 | Raffle |