



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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FINANCIAL AID FOR 30: ENGAGING HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN AND SOPHOMORES

How does one engage a group of 10th-graders to the point that they are on the edge of their seats, giddy with anticipation in responding to the question, “What does FAFSA stand for?” We discovered that we could do that by making the question worth 40 points in the game of College Jeopardy, of course!

One of the challenges in working in the School and Community Outreach Office at my community college was attempting to reach out to underrepresented high school seniors who were not familiar with higher education or their options. Many of the students we met shared the same sentiment: “I wish I had known about college when I was a freshman or a sophomore.” Many of them said that had they known college was an option, they would have planned differently.

As part of our outreach efforts, we felt it was important not only to serve high school seniors, but also prospective students of two, three, and four years down the road. Because freshmen and sophomores are not too keen on listening to someone talk about the joys of college, we presented the basics through a game called College Jeopardy.

The Game—College Jeopardy

The game was based largely on the television version of Jeopardy. There were five college-related categories from which to choose, including Admissions, Financial Aid, and 2- or 4-Years. (In the 2- or 4-year category, a student had to guess whether a particular occupation required a 2- or a 4-year degree—e.g., teacher, environmental science field technician.)

Preparation was minimal for us; it was simply a matter of developing questions, training Student Ambassadors to lead the game, and scheduling visits to area high schools. There was an initial financial investment in a tri-fold brochure, a tabletop display board, and six bells (such as one might find at a service counter in a grocery meat market or dry goods store).

Students were divided into groups of five or so, depending on the size of the class. We explained the rules of the game and strongly encouraged all of the students to participate fully and join in on all of the discussions. Then each team was given a bell.

Point values for the questions varied, depending on the degree of difficulty of the question. For example, a 10-point question might be: “When you are in college, are your books free, or do you buy them?” Whereas a 50-point question might be, “What do you call free money you get from the government to go to college, money that you don’t have to pay back?”

Essentially, the team that had control of the board would select a category and point value, such as Admissions for 30. Point values ranged from 10 to 50, in 10-point increments. As soon as a question was asked, teams would ring their bell; the “host,” typically a Student Ambassador, would call on a team. The team members had 30 seconds to discuss their collective answer; and if it was correct, they were awarded the points. Otherwise, another team could ring in. A brief explanation followed each question, and students had the opportunity to ask questions throughout the game. Fifteen minutes before the end of the class period, team scores were tallied, and the members of the winning team were presented with a prize (e.g., a pencil bag or a pen imprinted with the college logo). All other students received a key chain or pencil. Just before the class ended, we asked each student to share something he or she had learned.

The game met our objectives:

- Introduced freshmen and sophomores to the general concept of college, many of whom were potential first-generation college students
- Provided a fun, interactive process by which to discuss topics associated with college
- Presented the opportunity for our college to develop a stronger partnership with the high school, promoting and supporting easier access to juniors and seniors
- Offered valuable public speaking and presentation experience, and
- Promoted teamwork among the students.



Feedback

The response from teachers was overwhelming. Every year we sent letters and made follow-up calls to high school counselors and teachers, informing them of our outreach services, with College Jeopardy listed as an option. By the third year, the game was in such demand that we no longer advertised it as a service and schools called us early in the year to get on our calendar.

The teachers of high school freshman- and sophomore-level courses appreciated our outreach efforts. And because they were not bombarded with requests from colleges to make presentations to their classes, as were the teachers of senior-level courses, they welcomed us warmly. They also appreciated the fact that their students were learning about options for higher education early in their high school careers.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON AN EDUCATED PERSON

I have the privilege of teaching a mathematics course specifically designed for liberal arts and other nonscientific, nontechnical majors. It is a survey course where we explore several different topics.

Teaching a course of this nature has unique challenges. For the most part, these students have had less-than-positive experiences in math throughout their academic lives. Over the years, I have found ways to show them that math can be enjoyable and a course in which they can succeed. I am always designing lessons in response to the ever-present question: "What do we need this for?"

However, one semester I was faced with a different twist on that question. My class wanted to know why they had to take a math class at all! After trying to explain that it is a part of their general education requirements, much like history, humanities, English, science, and foreign language, I decided to turn the tables. My question to them was: "What characterizes an educated person?" Their responses were quite insightful, as you will see. They agreed that an educated person:

- Is motivated
- Is open-minded
- Is patient
- Is cognizant of what he/she knows and does not know
- Has varied life experiences

College Jeopardy planted the seeds of going to college in the minds of many underrepresented students. Among other lessons, learning that grants were available and that community colleges have an open-door admissions policy helped students realize that college could be in their future.

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- Is open to new ideas
- Is familiar with a little bit of everything
- Has common sense and is logical
- Takes pride in accomplishments and behaviors
- Is book-smart and street-smart
- Is someone who reads
- Can do simple calculations without a calculator
- Asks questions and is curious
- Is flexible
- Is willing to take risks
- Is self-aware
- Can speak intelligently
- Displays global awareness

When we were finished compiling our list, we all agreed that, for the most part, all of these characteristics could be cultivated through their general education course work. Compiling this list was time well spent. The students appeared to enjoy this excellent opportunity to share important ideas about educational outcomes and about the individuals we were all striving to become.

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