



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

A&P I INSPIRATION NIGHT

The second annual A&P I Inspiration Night, held about four weeks before fall term final examinations, involved nine health care fields represented on the Montana State University–Great Falls, College of Technology (MSUGFCOT) campus: EMS, PTA, Respiration Therapy, Surgical Technician, LPN, MSU Bozeman RN, Radiation Technology, and Dental Hygiene. It used the services of a number of graduates of the Anatomy & Physiology (A&P) program and representatives from one of the nearby institutions that offers a baccalaureate degree in nursing. Current A&P I and Human Biology students were invited, drawing 127 students.

It went like this. Students chose two health programs in which they might have interest, were grouped based on their selections, and sent through two rotations, one for each of the programs they had selected. Each session involved interacting with current students in the program of choice, usually in that program's designated campus area. For example, students who selected Surgical Technology were escorted to Surg Tech's mock Operating Room where they participated in hands-on activities designed to give them some insight into the value of the A&P that they are studying, as well as to introduce them to the skills and requirements of careers in Surgical Tech. The activities were led by students currently finishing the Surgical Technology program.

A primary purpose of this event was to encourage students taking the first semester of A&P to continue their efforts and complete the course successfully. A secondary purpose was to inform those students and interested others about the array of Health Science programs and careers available at or through the college.

The Health Sciences division offers certificates and degrees in nine areas. Students must first enroll in and successfully complete two semesters of A&P offered through the Arts and Sciences Division. These courses are an important and necessary part of their preparatory work, but many students struggle to get through them.

As they progress, they do not always know much about their options. An additional important goal, then, is to educate students about alternatives—thus, the two sessions, rather than just one. This gets students thinking about alternative plans should they not be selected into their original program of choice. For example, Radiation Technology accepts only nine students from almost 50 applicants. Students who are not selected may attempt to gain admission into another program. And once they have more information, some students realize that they want to go in a different direction anyway. This year eight students changed programs as a result of their Inspiration Night experience. One student explained that she did not even know what Surgical Technology was before, but now she cannot wait to apply to the program. It is important that students know all of their options in order to make good career decisions early on. Finding out about a program after they have already put in a year or two toward a different career can be discouraging and inefficient.

Among the eight who decided to change after this A&P Night, one wrote, "During the session with the dental hygiene group, I found out it really isn't what I thought it was going to be. I think I will go with one of the other programs instead."

The A&P Inspiration Night is intended to improve student success rates. The event occurs at an opportune point for several reasons, not the least of which is the tendency of students to question whether they want to continue the course or even stay in school. In a November 2009 *USA Today* article, "A Feast of Doubts for College Freshmen Come Thanksgiving," Robin Mamlet and Christine VanDeVelde stated:

"It's called the 'turkey drop'—when first-year college students break up with their high school sweethearts over the Thanksgiving holiday. But there's a risk that freshmen might break up with their college, too. Homesickness, roommate conflicts, academic pressures, difficulty forming new friendships—any of them can cause college freshmen to leap to the conclusion that they've



chosen the wrong school [or program] and that transferring to another is the answer...It can happen no matter how mature or accomplished a student is."

In its attempt to ward off this self-doubt and be entertaining and inspirational, the A&P evening begins with a 15-minute DVD presentation showing the "faces" of the program in a humorous way, including scenes from classroom activities, labs, faculty at their work, and others. Many current students appear in various segments of the piece, which has been edited to heighten some of the humorous effect. As a matter of fact, a large number of current and former students participate in carrying out this event. It is likely that when students see themselves or their peers in the video or as presenters, they feel an added sense of belonging and worth, well-known factors in retention. And there is no better source of information and inspiration than the students who have "been there and done that," so Q&A time was built into each session. One student observed, "Helped me a lot. Really opened my eyes to all of the possibilities and different positions as an RN. The activities were really cool. Got to put on a sterile gown and gloves."

On a questionnaire distributed to students on the day following the event, responses ranged from "What a great event! A&P is so hard, but last night helped me realize that the hard work will all be worth it" to "I was about ready to give up. But this was a great reminder of how much I want to be a nurse. I am determined to finish A&P this semester. Thanks for the boost."

Others wrote: "I think the night was awesome! I really feel like the faculty care and want to help students succeed." "Most useful to me was seeing the tools and environment of my career choice." And "A&P Night cemented my career choice." Faculty and others who participated agreed that the evening produced significant, positive results.

Staff, current students, former students, faculty (all volunteers); minimal expenses for pizza and lemonade; and donated door prizes carried this event to completion. Current students could see success, and faculty could see the fruits of their labors in former students who made presentations and talked about the value of the education that they had worked hard to attain. It takes organization to schedule the sessions, book the rooms and labs, and line up the volunteers. Follow-up included questionnaires, thank-you notes, and de-briefing sessions to help plan the next term's event.

If for only the reason that it made people feel good and fulfilled by their involvement, this event was a success. As one student put it, "I loved it! It was very helpful to talk to students who are currently in the

program. They let us know what to expect, yet were very encouraging. The entertainment was great and provided a nice little getaway from the stress of school. I think it's great you guys take the time to put this night on, and I really appreciate your hard work. I know I benefited from it!" And that's very inspirational.

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