
Assessment of the BRC Retreat

September 5 – 7, 2008
Olympic Valley, CA

Prepared by Gary McMahon

Overview

The BRC annual retreat was held in Olympic Valley, CA from September 5 – 7, 2008. The Squaw Valley Lodge was used for lodging. The workshops were held in the conference room at the Squaw Valley Lodge.

This year's retreat was held three weeks earlier in the semester than in past years. The reason for the earlier date was to have a greater and longer impact on the students. The retreat came at the end of the 2nd week of the Fall semester.

Also, this year twice as many students participated in the retreat. This was due to three reasons:

1. The BRC is supporting the growth of "mini-BRCs" in other colleges and departments. Students from the Journalism department and the Upward Bound program attended this year's retreat.
2. The BRC is anticipating financial support from the LAM Research Corporation that is to be used directly for the 2008/09 BRC Student Leadership Retreat.
3. The BRC's partnership with SAP Fellow Dr. Ray Boykin has provided the BRC with the financial flexibility to meet the immediate financial commitments of the retreat. (The BRC is working closely with Dr. Boykin in order to assure the BRC students have sufficient information technology skills.)

In total 45 students participated in the two and a half days of workshops and social activities. Seven staff members volunteered to transport the students the 135 miles from Chico, CA to the retreat's location. This required seven SUV rentals from Enterprise Car Rental. All appropriate university travel and risk management forms were completed before departing for the retreat.

University staff, faculty, administrators, and corporate partners attending the retreat included:

- Miguel Sahagun, Educational Opportunity Program
- Bertha Alicia Curiel, Admissions Office
- Teresita Curiel, Pre-College MESA and CAL-SOAPS Program
- Guadalupe Ramirez-Carrillo, Upward Bound Program
- Oscar Haro, BRC
- Gary McMahan, BRC
- Glen Toney, California State University Trustee
- Dave Waddell, Journalism Instructor and Advisor for the ORION student newspaper
- Marc Siegall, professor in the College of Business
- Meredith Kelley, Interim Vice Provost for Enrollment Management

- Sandra Flake, Provost for Academic Affairs
- Julie Bonnie, PG&E

The large number of university partners participating in the retreat is an indicator of three important factors.

- It represents the BRC's reputation among university's professional.
- It demonstrates the level of the personal commitment to serving the first generation college student of all those who volunteered their weekend.
- It is an indicator of the BRC's collaborative skills.

The retreat's location was selected because it reinforced the theme of the retreat, "The Journey Upward and Beyond." The Squaw Valley Lodge sits at the base of Indian Chief Rock and is surrounded by several taller mountain peaks. The phrase, "The Upward Journey and Beyond", came from years of observations with working with first generation college students. Many first generation college students come from low income backgrounds and they are confronted with enormous economic and social challenges. Coming from this background, the fact that they simply got into college seems like the tallest "mountain" they will ever have to climb. Indeed, it might be the steepest of the personal mountains in their lives, but it is not the tallest. Upon entering college, the first generation college student must learn how to thrive in college, understand the transformative nature of higher education, and begin to prepare themselves for career and life opportunities.

The retreat presented six different workshops. The retreat's schedule and working notes are included in Appendix A. The workshops included the following components:

- Educational and Life Motivational Presentations
- The Importance of Personal Responsibility
- Opportunities to Contribute as a Problem Solver
- An Exploration of our Personal Strengths,
- Creating Productive Study Habits
- Learning to Socially Network
- Accepting the Challenge to Thrive in College

In addition, opportunities to interact with role models were provided with a group campfire, meals, karaoke, and a trip to High Camp. The trip to High Camp required a ride on the cable car. At the top of the ride, the students were able to see Lake Tahoe and reflect on their own life's journey.

Assessment Summary

Feedback was gathered from students, staff, and corporate partners. Appendix B and Appendix C includes their complete and unedited comments. The participants considered the retreat to be of high quality, effective, motivational, and life changing. There was one concern about economic efficiencies and workload.

Dr. Glen Toney, California State University Trustee and Workshop Participant

- “... I was greatly impressed by our students’ involvement and participation, their questions and comments while interacting with presenters and their sustained focus, on the objectives of the retreat, over the two and a half days.”

Julie Bonnie, PG&E and Workshop Participant

- “... I was pleased to find that they were a wonderful audience to speak to and thoroughly professional at every encounter.”

Dr. Marc Siegall, College of Business Professor and Workshop Participant

- “...but there could have been more efficient use of resources. I observed several occasions where purchases (e.g., tickets for the various Sunday morning events) were made without first gauging the demand for these purchases. In other words, a lot of tickets/rooms were bought, that seemed to go unutilized. (Given the nature of students and other attendees, the food purchases probably were reasonable.)”

David Waddell, Journalism Instructor and Student Newspaper Advisor

- “... The “How Big is the Circle?” talk was also a very good session because it got students thinking about what they can do to help others go to and succeed in college. I think it helped inspire one of my African-American students to tell me later than he wanted to help me recruit at his Oakland high school....”

A Senior Student Participant

- “...I can’t explain the feeling when I was able to see all the beauty around us. My eyes were watery and I felt my heart beating in my throat.”

A First Time Freshmen Participant

- “... Another thought that came up was, “What type of business owner do I want to be?” I also began to rethink the way my business structure is set up. I want to make sure that we are giving back to the community and making a difference.”

Opportunities for Continuous Improvement

The BRC staff has identified the following areas for improvement:

- Due to the rapid growth of student participation in the BRC program, some expenses grew larger than anticipated.
 - Transporting 45 students safely from campus to the retreat was a logistic challenge
 - Next year, alternative methods of transportation will be explored, with the students’ safety always being the number one priority. For example, if 12 person vans were rented, nearly \$900 in transportation cost would have been realized. Originally the BRC staff was told by the local Enterprise Rental Car outlet that vans were not available. When the SUVs were picked up for the retreat, there were two, 12 person vans in the Enterprise lot.
 - Discussions will be held with the Enterprise Car Rental corporate recruiter in an effort to develop some discounts for the next retreat.
- The facilities were not “college student friendly” or conference service friendly.
- The large number of students participating in the retreat made it difficult for all the students to participate in Question and Answers sessions and in a Brainstorming session.
 - Strategic planning needs to take place to address the recent participation growth in the BRC. The BRC must constantly strive to keep all the students engaged and valued.
- Feeding up to seventy people three meals a day while trying to save money is an exhausting endeavor.
 - In an effort to lower expenses, four of the meals were prepared by several staff members attending the retreat. This required the making of over two hundred sandwiches etc. It also required early morning and late night food preparations. Although not visible to the students, the staff was extremely tired by the end of the retreat. The next day they all had to be back at work. Another method has to be used for meals.

- Too many workshops were required of the students. Students began to burn out toward the last one.
 - The retreat coordinator was concerned about the return on the investment. He struggled with whether to add the 4th workshop on Saturday. In retrospect, it was not fair to the presenter because of the students' fatigue.
- All of the student participants were required to provide a short written assessment of the retreat through email.
 - Although some of the emails were well written, others demonstrated unacceptable skills for a college-level assignment. These students will get additional tutoring. Their individual email assessments will be used as a benchmark in order to measure their progress.

The issues that need to be addressed are “good” problems. They are the result of the BRC success in student development and the BRC’s successful collaboration efforts.

Appendix A

(The following is the agenda and communication notes for the recent retreat)

The Upward Journey and Beyond

Student Leadership Retreat

Squaw Valley Lodge

201 Squaw Peak Road, Squaw Valley, USA

September 5, 2008

12:00 pm Pick Up cars at Enterprise – Terista will use Gary’s AMEX card

2:00 pm Depart Chico –

- This time will vary depending on when students get out of class. Lupe will be responsible for getting Upward Bound students to the retreat and Dave will take care of getting the Journalism students to the retreat

5:00 pm Arrive Squaw Valley Lodge and Check-In (201 Squaw Peak Road, Olympic Valley, CA 94146 530-583-5500)

- After getting your grouped checked in, there is a Parking Garage right next to the lobby’s front door
- In order not to overwhelm the lodge’s staff, we will check in one car load at a time. The rest of will stay outside.
- PLEASE REMIND YOUR STUDENTS
 - **NO SMOKING IN THE ROOMS – THE \$300 FINE GOES ONTO MY AMEX CARD**
 - **NO INCIDENTALS – DO NOT USE THE PHONE IN THE ROOM – IF THEY WANT TO CALL HOME BECAUSE THEY ARE EXCITED ABOUT THE EVENT/LOCATION, THEY CAN USE MY CELL PHONE – AGAIN ALL INCIDENTALS ARE ON MY AMEX CARD**

6:00 pm Complete Check In and 1 hour Free Time (Room List already provided to Lodge)

7:00 pm Group Dinner at **BLUE COYOTE SPORTS GRILL** (about 100 steps from lodge) Located in the plaza area – **Due to the Cost, Everything On the Menu is Available to Students EXCEPT “OFF THE GRILL” items**

8:00 pm Session 1 – “The Long and Winding Road” Facilitators –Glen Toney, Gary McMahon, Oscar Haro - The Ponderosa Room

- Background – Student Diversity @ Chico State
- The BRC Story
- Changes, Challenges, & Collaboration,
 - The Upward Journey and Beyond
 - Why is the retreat at such a nice place?
 - Hand Out T-shirts
- Break Out Into Groups (EOP, BRC, Journalism)
 - Review Rules for the Weekend – Get Buy In from students

9:30 pm Free Time

September 6, 2008

8:00 am Light Breakfast in Gary’s Room – Location Subject to Change

9:15 am Session #2 “How Big is the Circle?” discussion- Gary McMahon, Glen Toney , Oscar Haro
The Ponderosa Room

(Purpose: Provide the Students With the Big Picture of California’s Economic Future and Proceed to Where They Fit In. Also, make sure the students understand the importance of individual responsibility.)

- The Current Situation
 - College Going Rates
 - The Consequences of a Shortage of College Educated Workforce
- Discuss the Reality of AB 540
- Narrow the Discussion Down to Individual Responsibilities
- Challenge and Empower the Students
- Watch DVD on Julia Parker

Get Bag Lunch Menu Orders From Students

10:15 am Break

10:30 am Session # 3 StrengthFinder 2.0, Julie Bonnie – PG & E Ponderosa Room

(Purpose: Help Students to Understand and Value Their Strengths and the Strengths in Others. This technique is used by PG & E)

- Introduction to Strength Finder 2.0
 - Identify our 5 Major Strengths
 - Review Action Plan
 - Hand Out Book

11:45 Bag Lunch

1:15 Session #4 “How a Teacher Thinks”, Marc Siegall , College of Business - Ponderosa Room

(Purpose: Help Students to Succeed in the Classroom.)

- MAGIC Study System (Laptop, wireless network, projector, screen all available)

2:15 Break

2:30 “How to Network” Julie Bonnie ,PG&E – Ponderosa Room

(Purpose: Professional Development)

- Interactive Presentation on Meeting People
- Creating a Positive First Impression

3:45 Free Time – Swimming Pool is heated

6:45 Dinner Location – To Be Announced (If you are just arriving, Gary’s cell phone is 530-680-8725) Originally we were having a outdoor BBQ, but swarms of aggressive meat bees have changed my mind

8:00 Campfire – Silver Creek Campground (About 2 miles away from Squaw Valley on HWY 89) Please bring some folding chairs

- Smores and Sharing

9:30 Return to Lodge – Get Bag Lunch Orders for Sunday

Sunday, September 7th

8:00 Light Breakfast Available in Gary's room (subject to room change)

9:00 am The Upward Journey and Beyond, Oscar Haro and Gary McMahon

(Purpose: Tie Everything Together – Make Students Aware of the Unseen Mountains They Still Have to Climb)

- A Sense of Place
- A Sense of Purpose

10:00 am Cable Car Up To High Camp – Swimming Pools, Roller Skating, Hiking, Unique View of Lake Tahoe. (If students are afraid of heights, put them in the center of the gondola and pretend it is a bus ride)

(Purpose: Actually see how one mountain peak can be so steep that it blocks out the view of the next mountain, a mountain that is even taller)

12:00 Bag Lunches at High Camp

2:00 Check Out and Return to Chico

Appendix B

(Email Reflections From Faculty, Staff, and Presenters)

From: Presenter
Sent: Monday, September 08, 2008 3:58 PM
To: McMahon, Gary

Gary

Thank you, your team and your guest for developing and executing an excellent retreat for our students. I was greatly impressed by our students involvement and participation, their questions and comments while interacting with presenters and their sustained focus, on the objectives of the retreat, over the two and a half days. I enjoyed talking to several of them on a personal bases. I look forward to following up with you and them over the course of the year. Continue to enlarge the circle, Gary. In doing so, you will help to create a better world.

Regards

From: University Staff
Sent: Tuesday, September 09, 2008 3:34 PM
To: McMahon, Gary
Subject: RE:

Gary,

I thought that the retreat was a huge success.

- 1. The content was insightful because it showed understanding of the hurdles, fears and concerns that poor, 1st generation college students face. Dr. Toney was inspirational and real with the students about the ability they all have to be as successful as him as long as they put in the hard work. You and Oscar set the tone for the feeling of “family” that we all felt throughout the weekend. This is no small feat when considering that you added the Upward Bound Alumni leadership team and the**

Journalism students recruited by Dave Waddell. Their integration to the retreat was seamless.

- 2. There was 100% “buy-in” from all of the participants and staff who attended the retreat and it felt as if the buy-in happened before we reached Squaw Valley. The students arrived prepared to listen, learn, share and teach. The students did a great job of reaching across the various groups that were represented (BRC, UB Alumni, JBRC). I think that you and Oscar established the tone that we were “increasing the circle” and they did just that. The staff and friends of the BRC that were there also bought-in and pitched-in wherever and whenever possible and necessary. I think that we all showed that “no job was beneath us” , as Dr. Toney said on Friday night.**
- 3. Aside from words like amazing, wonderful, great, there was a feeling of gratitude and joy that radiated from the entire group. The students who rode in my car back to Chico were just gushing over their experiences. I felt privileged to have played a small role in the retreat. This retreat was the best single event that I have been a part of in my professional career.**

Thank you for re-inventing the wheel! Conventional practices just don’ t work with these students and you’ ve found the formula that does! I am grateful for the crucial work that you and Oscar do, and appreciate being able to work with you!

-----Original Message-----

From: Corporate Partner

Sent: Tuesday, September 09, 2008 3:02 PM

To: McMahon, Gary

Subject: Re:

Gary,

First of all, I want to thank you for giving me th opportunity to meet the students of the BRC. I was pleased to find that they were a wonderful audience to speak to and thoroughly professional at every encounter. You and Oscar really are providing these kids with the life skills that they will need to do well in school, in their careers, and in the world they will run some day.

In addition, Strengthfinders turned out to be a great activity and one that I know they will use to guide them for years to come. Thank you for going all the way with that idea. We make a good team.

I will be up there next Thursday for the engineering career fair and would love to give you the spreadsheets of what everyone's top 5 are from their team building exercise. I never gave goodies to the winning team so now, will provide something for all.

Julie

From: Participating Faculty
Sent: Monday, September 08, 2008 7:29 PM
To: McMahon, Gary
Subject: RE:

The following are my opinions and impressions of the BRC Retreat, held the first weekend of September 2008. I attended the event from mid-Saturday through noon Sunday.

The purpose, intent, and structure of the Retreat appeared to be quite good. For the BRC to succeed, it must rely on a core group of motivated students; and, given its mission and primary target populations, a diverse group of students. From my interaction with students, both in groups and individually, the attendees fit the bill. My overall impression of the students is that they are bright, energetic, and ready to work for their own and fellow students' success. This Retreat served as a way of developing the students' success skills (for both the classroom and careers), increasing buy-in to the BRC's culture, and creating a network among the students. Even the students I considered to be more marginal in their interest, still displayed a satisfactory level of engagement.

Another factor that will have an impact on the BRC's meeting its goals, is the provision and coordination of established university student support programs. Having key campus resource people, such as representatives from MESA and EOP, also was a smart move. Not only were the students and staff able to get to know each other better, but there were important connections formed between the staff members (and between staff and this faculty member).

To summarize so far, I believe that there was a good balance of "skills training," BRC enculturation, and (often via the various free/play times) networking among the students. In the short time I spent at the Retreat, I observed an increase in the bonds between students. This all seemed to be a good start to the year, and to the BRC's new, university-level, mission.

As an invited participant/presenter, I feel that I was very well taken care of, and particularly appreciate the help I was given with filing the required university paperwork.

On the down side, I believe that too much of the burden for conceptualizing, organizing, and realizing the Retreat was taken on by Gary McMahon – and, to an extent with which I am not as familiar, Oscar Haro. Even with the student and staff assistance that seemed to be available, far too much was taken on by Gary and his family (his literal family).

The Retreat obviously was very well funded – I hope that there were no out-of-pocket expenses for any of the staff or their relations – but there could have been more efficient use of resources. I observed several occasions where purchases (e.g., tickets for the various Sunday morning events) were made without first gauging the demand for these purchases. In other words, a lot of tickets/rooms were bought, that seemed to go unutilized. (Given the nature of students and other attendees, the food purchases probably were reasonable.)

These two issues, overload for Gary et al., and the potential for more efficient use of resources, are related. I believe that if Gary had been given greater staff support for the rather large task of creating and organizing the Retreat, there would have been a greater opportunity for more accurately determining the demand for the Retreat's various activities and functions. In short, I think that if Gary had been given more assistance/resources, the net effect would have been a monetary savings (or, at worse, no difference in total expense) and less stress on key professional staff and their dedicated relations.

Factors that increase the odds of burnout by Gary, Oscar, and their student staff, in general, should be moderated where possible. These people are key to making the new conceptualization of the BRC work. While human costs are not as visible as, say, OE, they are very real and affect the success of the organization.

In sum, while likely there are opportunities for increased efficiencies at the next Retreat, this year's Retreat seems to have been effective. Time will tell, but already I've had a BRC student who is in one of my courses come up and talk with me about the Retreat after class.

From: University Staff

Sent: Saturday, September 13, 2008 2:19 PM

To: McMahon, Gary

Subject: RE:

I'd like to start by again thank you for including me. I not only had an enjoyable time, but found the interaction with the students and colleagues very positive and insightful. I was impressed with the thematic organization of the event: one thing connecting and leading to the next. I thought your talk about what was to be accomplished and the BRC vision was important to frame activities for the students. Dr. Toney's talk was incredible - to have accomplished so much while growing up with so little is truly inspiring! I walked away thinking "values, determination and dream" is all you need! Of course, the accommodations and location were fantastic. For some, the weekend offered many new experiences and that is an important aspect of the college. The students were much more engaged with each other on the ride back home, full of energy, and motivated. (And it wasn't just chit chat, but conversations and idea sharing about academics.) Heck, I was more motivated too because as professionals, we feed of students' energy. I also appreciate the chance to hang out with other professionals who are passionate about students, access and diversity. Thank you for your hard work and dedication - I thought you and your team were awesome!

How did you think we (the professionals) did? Did you get from me/us what you expected or needed? Feedback is important to me, too. :-) I wish I could have experienced the other workshops, as they seemed intriguing, but I was very happy to make sandwiches, too - this is an important supporting role. In fact, I really appreciated being involved in an event that I didn't have to lead myself - and I realized that I need to do more of this.

Thank you again. I look forward to more opportunities

From: University Staff
Sent: Tuesday, September 09, 2008 3:22 PM
To: McMahon, Gary; Haro, Oscar
Subject: Thank you! / Gas reimbursements

Good Morning, I want to thank the both of you for your generous and genuine invitation and hospitality this weekend. I think that I can speak for both myself and my students! I'm really looking forward to future opportunities of collaboration.

I have the receipt for gas reimbursements but not sure if there is any paperwork that I need to fill out for you? Please let me know and I can bring that over.

Thanks again,

