



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

N.E.A.T. Grant Project Final Report 2017-18

Project Title: Student Alumni Council Leadership Development Speaker Series

- 1) **Purpose:** The purpose of the ‘Student Alumni Council Leadership Development Speaker Series’ was to pair members of the WSU Student Alumni Council with alumni experts through a series of intimate networking events that the Office of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving coordinated during the academic year. The networking event offered the council members (student leaders) the opportunity to meet selected alumni for focused, topical discussions and informal career exploration. The speaker series also provided the alumni the chance to informally mentor student leaders in a manageable group setting.
- 2) **Scope:** The project explored alumni/student interaction that provides alumni awareness and relevancy among current students. The Student Alumni Council Leadership Development Speaker Series was open to WSU Student Alumni Council members and student leaders from the call center. The alumni participants were assembled from the alumni population residing in the Metro Detroit area with the help from campus collaborations. Students had the opportunity to connect with alumni to discuss four topics (LinkedIn, Personal Branding, Networking Etiquette, and Work/Life Balance) over the academic term.
- 3) **Implementation:** At the onset of this project, the below timeline was proposed for the implementation.

July-August: Recruit alumni speakers (at least 6-8 speakers for the year). Formulate academic schedule (2 events in the fall and 2 in the winter).

September: Train current and new Student-Alumni Council members.

October: Hold first Professional Development Speaker Series event.

November: Hold second Professional Development Speaker Series event.

February: Hold Third Professional Development Speaker Series event.

March: Hold Fourth Professional Development Speaker Series event.

April: End of year recognition event for participating students and alumni speakers.

May-June: Send out end of year surveys to mentor and mentees. Hold Student-Alumni Summer Retreat (opportunity for an alumni speaker).

The implementation timeline was followed with some slight changes along the way. Changes include polling Student Alumni Council members during the August retreat and sending surveys after each speaker series event instead of at the end of the semester. During the Student Alumni Council summer retreat in August, a poll was taken to determine topics of interest among the members. Those topics were then narrowed down to four, with two topics in the fall (LinkedIn & Personal Branding) and two topics in the winter (Networking Etiquette & Work/Life Balance). The Leadership Development Speaker Series was advertised to colleagues across campus with the focus being on identifying alumni who had some expertise on one of the topics and who would potentially be interested in the engagement opportunity. Several members of the Office of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving reached out to potentially interested alumni and discussed all that the opportunity entailed. Once an alum was secured with date and topic, the event was coordinated with invitations sent to Student Alumni Council members and the student leaders of the call center.

Each Leadership Development Speaker Series event was held on a Friday from 4:30 p.m. to 6p.m. The first half hour of the event was used for students and the speaker to settle in, mingle, and enjoy hors d'oeuvres. At the start of the program the speaker would kick off an ice breaker activity to ease any remaining anxiety within the students, afterward the program topic presentation would begin. Students had the chance to ask questions throughout the presentation.

At the close of the winter semester a recognition event was held to celebrate the students' accomplishments over the academic year. Items that students were recognized for were leadership, alumni engagement, and philanthropy.

4) **Grant Money Allocation:**

- Hors d'oeuvres for each speaker series & recognition event
- Room set up equipment (tables & chairs)
- Gifts for speakers
- Recognition gifts for students

5) **Evaluation:** The students were surveyed after each speaker series event to identify if the students found value from the topic and/or speaker, if the program format was easy to follow, and if the students had suggestions for any improvements for future events.

Name

How interested in the topic were you before attending this event?

Did you learn anything from this event?

Did you find this event enjoyable?

Why or why not?

Did you find the speaker knowledgeable about the topic?

What would you recommend for the next event?

>>

- 6) **Findings:** Students found the Leadership Development Speaker Series to be the most meaningful resource provided to them by the Student Alumni Council. With the attendance of each event on average being 8-11 students, everyone enjoyed the smaller setting and felt more confident asking questions.

Through follow up conversations with the alumni speakers, what was found was that they enjoyed the opportunity to have one on one dialogue with students that allowed for deeper conversations around a topic they were passionate about.

- 7) **Conclusion:** The Leadership Development Speaker Series is a resource that students have been wanting. Students are very interested in opportunities to make connections

with alumni and learn skills that aren't necessarily taught in the classroom. As the Student Alumni Council continues to grow the Leadership Development Speaker Series will be a resource that will be priority to continue to develop and provide to not only Student Alumni Council students.

- 8) **The impact of this project on the future of the alumni association:** This project focused on alumni and student interaction, providing this opportunity to alumni and students going forward will assist in both fostering an engaged connection with alumni and the alumni association along with assisting in creating a more valuable resources for students that will help streamline the transition from involved student to engaged alumni.