

Indiana State University Career Center

A Report of the Measures of Student Behavior after Attending a Professional Skills Development Workshop

Purpose of the NEW

The Indiana State University Career Center hosts several Networking Etiquette Workshops each semester. The workshops are intended to help students to learn how to effectively develop their professional network and the all-important skills of dining in professional situations. The skills student participants learn through the workshops are valuable for social and professional situations, however specific tips are also provided to prepare participants for professional interviews and appropriate behavior in professional settings.

The first portion of the workshop is devoted to teaching key networking skills including self introduction, learning how to merge in and out of conversations, and how to present a business card. The next segment of the workshop is designed to inform participants of appropriate interview attire, as well as professional and business casual dress. The workshop concludes with a five-course etiquette dinner in which participants learn how to conduct themselves in professional dining situations, learning everything from which fork to use to guidelines for ordering in restaurant settings.

In an effort to make the Networking and Etiquette Workshops more interactive for participants, volunteers from the professional community serve as networking and table hosts. Hosts actively network with student participants and engage them in discussion throughout the dining portion of the evening, offering their professional feedback about the importance of networking and dining etiquette throughout the workshop.

Indiana State University faculty and staff and professional members of the surrounding community graciously serve as volunteer hosts. Through host participation, students have the opportunity to make some actual professional connections that could potentially lead to a mentoring, internship, or job possibilities.

Purpose of the evaluation

In the 2006-07 academic year, the Career Center, along with other units within the Division of Student Affairs moved toward the establishment of a "culture of assessment" to guide the unit toward evaluating its various programs and supports in order to measure the impact they have on holistic student growth, learning and development.

The NEW was chosen to be assessed as it is a "high profile" event with regard to connecting with the University and surrounding community through the use of volunteer hosts, and impacts the lives of hundreds of students each year, and to that regard can be considered a "major" program for the Career Center

Background

The NEW procedures included a portion at the beginning of the event where participants received information from volunteer hosts presenting a variety of information. Participants were placed in small groups of approximately 7 students. The student groups were then addressed by one of the volunteer hosts to provide fundamental information in a variety of areas of importance, including;

- Wearing of a Nametag, Handshaking and Self-Introduction
- Moving into and out of Conversations
- How to Exchange Business Cards
- Appropriate Attire

Participants were then provided the opportunity to apply the newly-learned skills in a large group setting consisting of all participants.

The participants were then invited to be seated in a dining area adjacent to the workshop room with 6 other student participants and a table host for the dining part of the experience.

A 5-course meal was served with a narrator explaining proper dining etiquette along with the opportunity to engage behaviors introduced in the first portion of the event. Table hosts were participant-observers during this portion of the event, and completed an evaluation based on the 4 learning objectives listed above. Those scores were then submitted to the Career Center staff and quantitative analysis was used to determine the degree each of the participants had learned.

Quantitative Data

Means and standard deviations were computed from the scoring sheets completed by the table hosts, ranking observed behaviors along the four domains, with scores being awarded from a low of 1 to a high of 4. Those descriptive data are presented in table 1 below.

Learning Objective	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Physical Appearance	230	3.13	.82
Table Manners	230	3.24	.74
Engagement with Others	230	3.04	.96
Assertiveness and Confidence	230	2.99	.92

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations

Several table hosts awarded perfect 4 ratings along all 4 learning objective domains. When those ratings were removed from the list, means and standard deviations were computed with the following results, which are believed to be more reliable than those reflecting the entire sample. Those results are shown in table 2 below.

Learning Objective	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Physical Appearance	197	3.02	.81
Table Manners	197	3.14	.73
Engagement with Others	197	2.89	.95
Assertiveness and Confidence	197	2.86	.90

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations filtering out perfect 4.0 scoring

Lessons learned

One of the initial findings of the investigation was that in previous NEW events, no clearly defined learning objectives had been established. Larger constructs of learning had been established which include such things as

Teaching networking skills

Informing participants of proper professional dress and attire

Teaching the essential elements of table manners in a professional setting

But as the constructs above are more general and overarching, they lack sufficient specificity to the degree necessary for quantitative or qualitative studies to measure the degree to which students actually learn. As a result, a scoring rubric was developed and instructions provided table hosts as to the interpretation of criteria and scoring instructions. For unspecified reasons, a small number of table hosts awarded perfect "4" scores for each student seated at their table in each of the four criteria.

The rating scale was constructed as a rubric based on the general learning objectives. While the rubric was built with the general learning constructs identified, volunteer hosts were asked to "rate" each of the student participants at their table. The hosts were briefed before the event that no students would see their ratings, and even with the fact that no identifying information of the host or the table was recorded on the form, there was still concern that the overall ratings might be skewed in a positive direction.

The following specific instructions were provided table hosts for purposes of evaluating and scoring student behavior according to the scoring rubric presented on the next page

Start with the first student to your right, and assign numbers starting with 1 until each student is assigned a number.

Please note that this event is somewhat "contrived and artificial," yet in of itself, presents challenges to typical students. While an interviewee wouldn't ask they type of questions they will during the event (i.e., regarding table manners, how to network and other questions often put to the table hosts), they are perfectly appropriate for this laboratory setting. It is the manner in which those questions and comments are made that should be evaluated. In the end, we hope you'll be able to assign broad scores to the individuals at the table you'll be hosting based on the entire event and how the person presented them that is appropriate for a formal business setting.

Score	4	3	2	1
Criterion				
Physical Appearance	Professionally dressed and appropriate in appearance. Poised, mannerly, and polished. Wearing full, crisp and neat suit of clothing.	Dress above typical casual, but lacking crispness that conveys a message of true professionalism. A casual sport coat or top that would be regarded as too informal for a professional setting.	Neat but casual to the point of being underdressed for a professional setting such as a simple dress shirt and tie.	Unkempt, inappropriate for a professional setting.
Table Manners	Impeccable with no apparent mistakes in table and dining etiquette while maintaining a high degree of comfort within the setting.	Professional yet somewhat "stiff" and committing only minor errors in table and dining etiquette.	Too casual and somewhat inappropriate along with committing obvious errors in table and dining etiquette.	Impolite and discourteous to the point of drawing attention to mistakes in table and dining etiquette.
Engagement with Others	Flawlessly flowed into and out of conversation with others. Questions put to others throughout the meal were appropriate to a professional setting. Demonstration of thoughtful listening and triggering meaningful and professional conversation	Tendency to be too dominant or submissive to the lead others took in table conversation. While engaging, the student's ability to take an active part in the conversation was somewhat lacking.	Although taking part in the conversation, fell somewhat short of maintaining a balance between thoughtful listening and taking the lead in conversations	Either too boisterous and inappropriate in the topic/flow of conversation, or painfully quiet and reserved to the point of not joining into meaningful conversation
Assertiveness and Confidence	Was appropriately assertive during the meal, conveying an air of confidence that did not appear overly-confident. Was flexible to the point of maintaining high degree of comfort in conversation and non-verbal cues suggesting full engagement during the meal	Minor difficulty in presenting with confidence and self-assuredness, yet was able to fully engage with others at the table in a professional and confident manner	Friendly, but somewhat inappropriate in engaging with others. Presented with obvious discomfort and lacking confidence within the setting	Failed to engage others appropriately and presented with what appeared to be high degree of discomfort, either to the point of being over-confident or significantly lacking in confidence and assertiveness

Recommendations for improvement

Prior to the next NEW event, specific learning outcomes should be established. Those specific learning objectives should be defined by a set of behaviors and those behaviors should be included on a scoring rubric.

Volunteer hosts, as raters of students' behavior, should be more thoroughly briefed on the following points:

- No student will see any of the hosts' rating sheets or scores awarded participants;
- The purpose of the rating is not to actually measure individual student performance, but to measure the effectiveness of the NEW program itself so analyses can be conducted to better understand how the event might be improved;
- Plan a qualitative study to compliment the quantitative study thus adding to the richness of the assessment of learning outcomes.