THE ZIE RIVERS ACADEMIC MENTORING PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Introduction

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Introduction

Program Description

The Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program is a peer-mentoring program designed to provide additional academic support to underrepresented student populations at James Madison University. It is also serves as a student retention tool to aid students in danger of leaving JMU due to poor academic performance.

The Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program is housed under the Centennial Scholars Program at James Madison University and is funded through a one-time donation of a JMU Board of Visitor’s member, Wharton “Zie” Rivers. His donation of 200,000 dollars is split between the Centennial Scholars Program and the JMU Department of Athletics. Since 2007, when the program began, 25,000 dollars has served as the yearly budget for all of the program’s expenses. In years past this has included the tutor salaries, resources and supplies for the tutors, as well as the coordinator’s graduate student assistantship costs. The Zie Rivers Academic Program is currently being funded by the last portion of this donation.

Program Characteristics

- Employs 11 tutors
- Provides tutoring in 15 courses including biology, statistics, economics, history, English, Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese
- Tutors provide services for 1-2 students a week

Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the tutoring program on student achievement and tutor development. The program will also evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategies employed by the coordinator to recruit student participants. The results of this evaluation will be used to improve the current strategies in place and to determine the current needs of the program.

Evaluation Components

This program evaluation consists of the following components:

- Program Description
- Evaluation Questions
- Stakeholder Analyses
- Data Collection Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Recommendations
**Stakeholders**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Primary Stakeholders</th>
<th>Secondary Stakeholders</th>
<th>Tertiary Stakeholders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Tutor Coordinator</td>
<td>• ZRAMP Peer Tutors</td>
<td>• Future student participants and tutors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Director of Student Retention for the Centennial Scholars Program</td>
<td>• Current ZRAMP student participants</td>
<td>• Parents of student participants</td>
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<td>• Wharton Zie Rivers</td>
<td>• Center for Multi-Cultural Student Services</td>
<td>• JMU professors</td>
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<td>• Office for Diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td>• JMU learning centers</td>
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<td>• President of JMU</td>
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Central Questions

This evaluation will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the impact of peer-tutoring on student academic achievement for ZRAMP participants?
2. How is the Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program meeting the expectations and needs of their tutors?
3. How can the Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program recruit more student participants?

Measures of Success

The success of the evaluation was measured based on ZRAMP’s ability to increase the confidence and skill levels for ZRAMP’s tutors, improve the academic achievement for ZRAMP student participants, and to ascertain if the programs current marketing strategies are effective. In order to determine if these goals were met, the evaluator will look at the average responses to the survey questions. Responses indicating agree or strongly agree to the matrix questions were also used to indicate the success of the program in meeting its goals. The conceptual framework above explains this idea further.
Survey Instruments and Results

Student Participant Survey
The purpose of the Student Participant Survey was to assess the effectiveness of the Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program on the academic achievements of the student participants. This survey consists of the following characteristics:

Survey Construction
- 8 closed and open-ended questions
- Asked questions regarding students’ study skills, academic performance, confidence and knowledge of subject matter before and after their participation in the program
- Used a 6 point Likert scale
- Employed the use of Qualtrics Survey Software

Participant Recruitment
- Solicited CSP students via Blackboard email system
- Non-CSP ZRAMP student participants were emailed
- Student tutors requested the participation of their tutees
- The survey was distributed via email 5 times

Results

Participant Involvement
- Survey was distributed to 30 students
- 13 students completed the survey
- The student participants consisted of both students in the Centennial Scholars Program and non-CSP students who were involved in the program last year, or the current semester.

Tutoring Involvement
The results of this survey indicate that 54% of the 13 student participants have received over 15 hours of tutoring and 23% of this population have received between 5 to 9 hours of tutoring. The majority of student participants have received tutoring in at least 2 subjects and 8% of the populations have received tutoring in 4 or more courses. While 77% of students heard about the program through the Centennial Scholars Program, 31% of the student participants were introduced to the program through CMSS.

Motivations for Tutoring
When asked why the students decided to attend tutoring, 87% of the respondents said that they attended the Zie Rivers session to improve their course grade. In addition, 54% of the students said that they wanted to avoid failing a class, and to increase their knowledge of a
particular subject. Only 8% of the respondents were attended the session from a recommendation of the CSP Director of Student Retention or their professors.

For these participants, the impact of Zie Rivers varied. For a little over half of the student participants, the Zie Rivers program helped increase their course grades, their understanding of the course material, and their confidence in their abilities to be successful in their classes. Many of the students strongly agreed or agreed that ZRAMP has helped them improve their study habits, increase their understanding of their homework assignments when alone. Nearly 61% of the students indicated that Zie Rivers helped them to avoid failing or withdrawing from a course.

Benefits of the program

When asked how the students helped to increase the benefits of their tutoring session, the majority of the students indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with their efforts to attend classes regularly, study their course material, copy notes from their tutoring sessions, respect their tutor, attend tutoring regularly, and actively engaged in the tutoring process. In order to advertise the program more effectively, student participants recommended posting flyers in the dorms, libraries, academic buildings, and utilizing Facebook.

Sample Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How have you benefited most from the Zie Rivers Program?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zie Rivers gave me confidence in myself provided not only from results of my courses but the tutor themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped me when I was struggling to understand some philosophy principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only went to one session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was always one-on-one tutoring and the tutor was very knowledgable about the subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me understand some of the material I couldn't figure out on my own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has help me to better understand the course material. It has given me the ability to gain the necessary tools for effective studying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better preparation for tests and quizzes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It benefitted me because I was able to do much better on a test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped me understanding things when I had an exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped me to understand the material in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It improved my study habits.</td>
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Tutor Survey

The purpose of the Zie Rivers Tutor survey was to examine the impact of the Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program on the self-esteem, learning, and abilities of the Zie Rivers’ tutors.
Survey Construction

- Consists of 8 questions
- Includes both open-ended and closed-ended questions
- The questions tutor’s length of involvement in the program, number of hours spent in tutoring during this semester, their perceived benefits of the program, and the ways in which their academic and professional skills were enhanced as a result of tutoring in the program.
- The survey was distributed two times over a three week period.
- The evaluator used the ZRAMP Gmail account to distribute the surveys via a Qualtric’s Survey Software link to all of the current tutors

Survey Distribution

- Distributed to 12 tutors
- 8 tutors participated in the survey
- 5 students completed the survey

Results

Tutor Work Experience

The results of this survey indicated that 50% of the tutor population has worked 6 months or less. The remaining 50% has worked between 1 to 3 years as a Zie Rivers tutor. While all of the tutors have worked more than 15 hours, 50% of the tutor respondents have only had 1 to 3 students attend their sessions. However, one student has seen over 10 students this semester.

Tutor Confidence

When assessing the impact of Zie Rivers on the confidence, motivation, subject matter knowledge, attitudes toward the subjects, and the tutors’ ability to empathize with their students, all of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the program has helped them improve. Two students somewhat agreed that the program helped them increase their study skills and ability to assess the needs of their students.

Professional Development Gains

As for the tutors’ professional development gains from the program, the majority of respondents indicated that there professionalism skills were only “somewhat” enhanced by their participation in the Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program. These skills consisted of their organizational skills, time-management skills, ability to work with diverse groups of people, interpersonal skills, and any other skills related to their future career goals. The remaining 37% indicated that the Zie Rivers Academic Program had increased their professional development skills to a great extent.
**Benefits of the Program**

When asked how the program benefited them most, the tutors responses stated that they had the opportunity to review and learn more about their tutoring subjects, earn money, teach diverse students, and become a an “effective member to the JMU community.”

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<tr>
<th>How have you benefited most from the Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Even though no student has attended my session yet but I have been working very hard on my subject matter in order to meet the needs of any student that might seek my help. In addition, I have been communicating with Ghist 150 teachers so that they can refer students having troubles in their class to seek additional help in my session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got paid and had a chance to review the material from classes that I took at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have improved my ability to explain and pass knowledge on to other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely relearning the material helps me a lot. Explaining something you know is more difficult that just performing the task. The more I can help people the better, and this has taught me how to become a more effective member of the JMU community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy tutoring, especially the opportunity to work with diverse students.</td>
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**Marketing Survey**

**Survey Construction**

The purpose of the Zie Rivers Marketing survey was to assess the effectiveness of the Zie Rivers Academic Mentoring Program’s current marketing strategies and to gain insight regarding the most effective method to reach the program’s targeted populations.

- 6 questions assessing the students’ familiarity of the program and preferred marketing strategies.
- Print surveys placed in CMSS

**Results**

- 10 students completed this survey
- 60% of the participants were familiar with ZRAMP
- 100% of the students have never attended ZRAMP
- 50% of the students were introduced to ZRAMP via CMSS
- Preferences for the best marketing strategies on campus were highly varied
Discussion

The results of this program evaluation confirm much of what was indicated in the Zie River Academic Semester Reports. While many tutors are working an average of eight hours a week, most of them are only seeing one to two students each week. Some of the tutors have yet to tutor students in this semester. Based on this research, this lack of engagement may be due to the tutor session locations and the current advertisement strategies. Despite the lack of student involvement, the tutors still seem to benefit from the program, especially academically. From this research, one might suggest that the program is both equally beneficial to tutors and student participants. Unfortunately, the ZRAMP has not made the strongest impact on the professional development skills of the tutors. This may also be due to the lack of students and opportunities to develop such skills. All in all, the program seems to have a tremendous impact on the tutors in a overwhelmingly positive way.

As for the student participants, ZRAMP seems to be making a positive impact on their learning and academic achievements. Some of the most noticeable benefits of the program for student participants are the clarification and understanding gains they have received as a result of tutoring. The students’ involvement in the program helped the majority of students to avoid failing and withdrawing from a course. With the primary motivation of student participants being to improve course grades, the program seems to be meeting student expectations. Munley, Garvel, and McNowell (2010) conducted a similar study to access the effectiveness of peer tutoring services on student academic achievement at the university level. Their findings also suggest a positive relationship between peer-tutoring and the academic achievement for
college students. More specifically, they found that when students participated in tutoring at least one hour a week, they were likely to gain an increase in their letter grade.

In addition to these positive impacts, there are certain areas of the program that can improve. The program could benefit from more effective marketing strategies, better training of tutors, and creating more partnerships with faculty members on campus. The marketing survey indicated that 60% of the students knew about Zie Rivers yet none of them actually used it. Surprisingly enough, only 20% of the students surveyed used any tutoring services at all. The next step in future evaluation is to see why people are not utilizing the tutorial services offered. This could have important implications for peer-tutoring programs on campus.

**Recommendations**

**Tutors:**

- **Provide more opportunities of ongoing support of tutors (Ching & Chang-Cheng, 2011).** The tutor coordinator should schedule regular meetings with tutors to discuss their needs, concerns, and/or tutoring experiences.

- **Incorporate opportunities of professional development for tutors.** Bi-monthly or semester workshops should be held for tutors to discuss topics such as tutoring strategies, interpersonal communication, and problem solving and administration (Ching & Chang-Cheng, 2011). Special guest can be invited to facilitate these meetings.

- **Include a 4 to 6 hour tutor training in the beginning of the first semester.** Training the tutors will help them better adjust to their role and meet the needs of the student participants. Potential topics to provide tutoring in include facilitation, problem-solving, listening skills, and study strategies for students.

- **Evaluate tutors on their performance (Ching & Chang-Cheng).** Evaluate tutors on their professionalism and tutoring practices. This will help promote professionalism among the tutors and also help them to assess their strengths and weaknesses.

**Marketing Strategies:**

- **Visit student organizations housed under CMSS and talk about the program to organizational members.** The coordinate should schedule times to speak with students organizations about the services of Zie Rivers and the academic needs of the organizations student members. The coordinator could also use this as an opportunity to recruit new members.
• **Network with the various academic departments of the tutoring courses being offered.** In the beginning of each semester, the coordinator or the tutors should meet with at least one professor from the various departments that correspond to the tutoring subjects and inform them about the program. This should be used as an opportunity to better help the tutors learn what is being taught in specific levels and also to help increase the awareness of the program.

**Program Improvements**

• **Have potential tutors completed an application.** This additional step may help increase the professionalism among tutors.

• **Have tutors provide a recommendation from a professor in the course in which they desire to tutor.** Providing a recommendation will help ensure that tutors of knowledgeable of the subject material and prepared to teach.
References


