

From Backpack to Briefcase: Building a Senior Transition Program

Léna Kavaliauskas Crain
University of Maryland
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Program Outline

- Background of senior experience programs
- University of Maryland Senior Experience
- Post-graduation transition issues
- UMD “Backpack to Briefcase” series
- Learning outcomes and assessment
- Merits of B2B program
- Questions to ask when building SYE

The Senior Experience

- 1990s: increased scrutiny about institutional responsibility, whether colleges needed to better prepare for post-graduation
- Senior year experience: to enhance learning and promote a successful post-graduation transition for students completing the final quarter of the baccalaureate degree

(Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998)

The Senior Experience

- 2012: 97% of institutions offer type of senior experience (Padgett & Kilgo, 2012)
- SYE categorized into five types:
 1. senior seminars and capstone courses
 2. career preparation programs
 3. academic synthesis showcases
 4. celebrations and rituals
 5. alumni cohesion events (Henscheid, 2008)

Why SYE?

- SYE categorized into five types:
 1. senior seminars and capstone courses
 2. career preparation programs
 3. academic synthesis showcases
 4. celebrations and rituals
 5. alumni cohesion events

(Henscheid, 2008)

- “Last chance” to teach (Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998)
- Capture data before graduation
- Increase alumni giving and engagement
- Improve employment rate



Post-Graduation Transition

- Employers dissatisfied with numerous “soft skills”
 - Ability to think critically
 - Initiative taking
 - Independent work ethic
 - Sense of professional ethics
- Students report similar dissatisfaction
 - Lack of preparedness
 - Advice to senior students (Zippert & Eubanks, 2012)
 - Skills gap of “practical skills”

Post-Graduation Transition

Removal of support (student services)

+

Transition stress

+

Lack of critical life skills

=

Decreased satisfaction,
employability, transition success

“Backpack to Briefcase” Series

The "Backpack-to-Briefcase" (B2B) series highlights critical life skills for graduating students that are not covered through other avenues at the university. The B2B series aims to improve the senior experience and post-graduation transition.

Planning

- **Program pilot:** 2 sessions, one invited group and one open attendance group. Pre/post-test data collected.
- **Focus group:** participants and at-large seniors identified topics, formats, timeline
- Identified campus and community partners
- Scheduled 6-part series → now 8-part

Focus Group: B2B Session Topics

“Workplace culture” “Professional dress”

“What is the best way to stay involved after college?”

“How do I get a credit card?”

“How to cook food that isn’t from a box”

“Finding friends outside of college”

“What rent is in my range?”

“How do I plan ingredients to use for multiple meals?”

Assessment

“Assessment begins with simply wondering whether what you do all day is contributing to what you hope your efforts can accomplish.”

(Bresciani, 2001, p. 1)

- **Indirect:** self-reported data; surveys, self-reflection, focus groups, interviews
- **Direct:** objective measures; tests of knowledge, supervisor ratings; rubric evaluations by others

Sample Items

Direct (open response or multiple choice items):

- What is the recommended monthly budget allocation percentage for housing costs?
- What is the most commonly under-budgeted/overspent line item?

Indirect (five-point Likert scale items):

- I am able to manage my personal monthly budget, including allocating amounts for monthly expenses such as housing, transportation, food, savings, and other costs.
- I have considered the items that will make up my personal bills following graduation.

Outcomes: Shifting the Paradigm

- Students expressed higher feelings of connectedness to institution, increased sense of preparedness for transition, increased perception of employability (student-centered)
- Graduates expressed higher intent to be involved as alumni (institution-centered)

Program Merits

- Low-cost, high impact
- Paradigm shift: driven by student input
- Reaches students without credit-bearing course
- Multiple stakeholders

Building a Senior Transition Program

- What are the existing resources?
- What skills are students missing?
- What do students want and need?
- (How) can we teach that?
- What do alumni and employers think?
- Who are the campus/community partners?
- How do we know this is working?

Select SYE Resources

Association/Conference: National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

Print Resources:

Butts, J.L., Carter, C.M., Dickens, T.L., Doerr, D.J., Emig, J.N., Glines, K.R., Hannon, F.D., & Michel, K.J. (2013). Senior year experience: An emerging course to transition beyond graduation. *Journal of Student Affairs – New York University*, 9, 3-8.

Gardner, J.N., & Van der Veer, G. (1998). *The senior year experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hart, P.D. (2008). *How should colleges assess and improve student learning? Employers' views on the accountability challenge. A survey of employers conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities*. Retrieved from http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap/documents/2008_business_leader_poll.pdf.

Henscheid, J.M. (2000). *Professing the disciplines: An analysis of senior seminars and capstone courses*. Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2000.

Henscheid, J.M. (2008). Institutional efforts to move seniors through and beyond college. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 144, 79-87.

Padgett, R.D., & Kilgo, C.A.. (2012). 2011 national survey of senior capstone experiences: Institutional-level data on the culminating experience (Research reports on college transitions No. 3). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Wendlandt, N.M. & Rochlen, A.B. (2008). Addressing the college-to-work transition: Implications for university career counselors. *Journal of Career Development*, 35(2), 151-165.

Yazedjian, A., Kielaszek, B. J., & Toews, M. L. (2010). Students' perceptions regarding their impending transition out of college. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 22 (2), 33-48.

Zippert, E. & Eubanks, D. (2012). *Campus assessment working group snapshot of student experiences: Advice to undergraduates from the class of 2010*. Retrieved from https://irpa.umd.edu/Presentations/2012Adv_Conf_Take_it_from_me.pdf

Presenter Contacts

Culinary Skills/Budgeting

Chef Michael Melnyk

570-419-5262

*Highly recommend- has MS in Higher Education,
excellent rapport with students!

Employability

Dr. David DeLong

<http://www.graduatetoagreatjob.com>

*Specializes in corporate market- new to student speaking,
but understands what employers look for

Urban Housing Search

Jordan Cooper

212-864-4555

*Will schedule as part of spring “tour” of campuses-
ask where they’ll be and tag on to their schedule

Q&A

Lkavalia@umd.edu

301.314.GRAD (4723)