

Alumni Presentations – Inspiring Students

Learning Outcome: Students will learn about life as a UHD alumnus, his/her experiences during the years in school and the transition into the workforce.

Summary: Students listen to oral presentations given by a visiting UHD alumnus, who will tell the class about his/her years at UHD, and how the experiences gained as a student served him/her in later life stages. Students have a chance to ask questions to the speaker if clarification or expansion on a certain topic is required. A dialogue between the speaker and the current students is highly encouraged.

Procedure:

This event was organized by the STAR Program office in conjunction with HIS (Hispanic Serving Institution) week celebrations. Events and experiences varied widely.

Experience 1: In the 'Strangers among us: the human microbiota' Freshman Seminar, a Natural Sciences alum spoke about his experiences as an undergraduate student at UH-D. He was very engaging and positive, showed slides of some of the activities he performed while performing scientific research projects, presenting his data at conferences and performing community service projects. He was very enthusiastic and maintained the interest of the class while describing the difficulties he encountered and how he overcame them with the help of the Scholar's Academy and other resources on campus. He also talked about how and why he chose to continue his education by obtaining a Master's degree; what personal factors influenced his choice of school and profession once he finished graduate school.

During his presentation, the students wrote one question to ask the speaker on a card. At the end of the presentation, the students had their questions ready, assuring their participation. At the end of the class, the instructor collected the student questions; if some were left unanswered, the instructor addressed them during the following class period.

Experience 2: In two separate sections of 'Biology of Food' Freshman Seminar, two different alumni visited. The students in both sections stated that overall they enjoyed each presentation. Neither alumnus was a science major, something that did negatively affect the overall experience. One alumnus was very casual in presentation. She talked a lot about her family life and briefly invoked references to God and biblical teachings that not all students may relate to (and were frankly unprofessional). The other alumnus was very formal in presentation and had a formal lecture with slides that may not have kept the attention of all students. Both alumni focused on their road to UHD and to their success, which was helpful to students. In the future, professors should meet with alumni speakers well ahead of class and should also have some input on who comes to their class. A student who majored in the general area of the Freshman Seminar Topic is essential.

One step taken to ensure student participation was to provide a slip of paper (1/3 sheet) where students were required to write at least one question for the speaker. This exercise required that students would pay attention to the speaker and also helped them work on the sometimes difficult task of generating questions to a speaker de novo, on the spot. Question slips were collected at the end of class for a participation grade. This component was highly successful and is recommended. In future semesters, more time will be allowed for questions to the speaker.

Experience 3: Students in the 'AIDS and Society' Freshman Seminar, along with other classes, attended an alumni event where they sat at round tables in a large room with 8 - 9 students and one alum per table. Lunch was provided and while some students conversed with alums, many others just ate and talked amongst themselves. Thus, they did not gain much knowledge from the alums. Additionally, the professor did not know which students heard what as the students were spread out and the professor was at only one of the tables. In the future, if the class attends an event like this, the students should have some questions to ask the alum. The students should also be asked to write a reflection on the alum interaction.