

YOUNG LAWYERS EMENTORING

I. Project Description

Mentoring and email are an age-old concept and a modern communication tool. Together, they allow the busy young lawyer juggling a family and the rigorous demands of the profession to significantly impact a high school legal magnet student's education. By communicating with students via email, young lawyers in Miami, Florida are utilizing the speed and ease of electronic communication to help their students achieve academic excellence, improve communication skills, and explore career goals. What does it take for a professional to succeed in work and in life? Is this, or a related field, the right career choice? Our high school students are finding out.

II. Project Planning/Development

A. Identification of Need

Most students formulate their educational and career goals during high school. Students also encounter the pressures of success in our competitive society. Encouragement and instruction from caring adults are critical. Students can never have too many positive and caring role models in their lives. Therefore, the Dade County Bar Association, Young Lawyers Section ("DCBA YLS") formed this eMentoring partnership with the Miami Senior High Legal and Public Affairs Magnet Program.

Our young lawyers provide individualized, academic, motivational, and emotional support to the students via email and personal contact at group meetings. This guidance helps the students achieve in school, work, and life. Simultaneously, the lawyers receive pro-bono credit for performing valuable community service while rarely having to leave their offices.

An affiliate should contact magnet high schools with programs emphasizing law and legal studies in the affiliate's area. If a magnet program does not exist, an affiliate can work with a high school of any type. Working with accelerated students with an interest in law is preferable. The affiliate needs to determine what, if any, mentoring programs exist in its target schools and assess their effectiveness. Once the affiliate identifies a suitable school, the affiliate should make an effort to discuss the formation of an ementoring program with school officials. The DCBA YLS quickly learned magnet high school students will line up for the chance to work individually with a young professional in their field of interest.

B. Determination of Project Goals and Design

1. Decisions to be Made

a. Options- Project Goals

Ementoring allows young lawyers to enhance the quality of a student's education. The project goals include: (1) providing students with information about the workplace and careers; (2) developing skills and confidence in the use of technology; (3) motivating students to improve academic achievement; (4) improving communication skills and writing abilities; (5) increasing self confidence; and (6) allowing mentors to boost their own personal growth-"by teaching you learn." The DCBA YLS worked hard to achieve these goals by assembling a group of energetic lawyers committed to helping students. The lawyers have also benefited greatly from the experience.

b. Options - Project Design

The DCBA YLS created a sixteen page detailed information packet which contains the mission statement, goals, steering committee, safety guidelines, polices, rules, evaluation process and training materials for both mentors and mentees. In addition to the information packet, the mentees receive the parent permission form, which must be signed before they can participate in the program. The volunteer lawyers are given applications that require a signature attesting to their good standing with the Florida Bar. All participants must complete profiles, which are used to pair up the participants based upon their common interests.

This eMentoring program matched twenty-four volunteer lawyers each with a ninth or tenth grade student (of the same gender) from the Miami Senior High Legal and Public Affairs Magnet Program. The participants work together throughout the school year. This magnet program began in 2000, and consists only of ninth and tenth grade students. An affiliate wishing to duplicate this ementoring program could include high school students of all ages. Here, the lawyer and student engage in weekly communication via e-mail. At least one communication per week (on Tuesday or Wednesday) is mandatory. The participants are then free to increase the amount of electronic communication as they desire and as their schedules permit.

The DCBA YLS limited the program to only twenty-four students in the inaugural year to ensure its success. All of our students volunteered to be in the program. The students were selected randomly by pulling names out of a hat since the number of volunteers exceeded the spots available.

Many mentoring programs fail due to overreaching and an inability to sufficiently monitor progress at the inception. An affiliate should carefully consider these issues prior to replicating an ementoring program. An affiliate should review the structure and functions of our steering committee as discussed later in Section VI.

Suggested topics are sent via email to all participants on Fridays for use the following week. The topics always relate to current events and personal issues about being a lawyer. The topics are designed to promote discussion. They should not limit the subjects of communication in any way. We covered terrorism, human cloning, television in the courtroom, and several other newsworthy issues. Here is an example:

"John's Law" Kenneth Powell is facing charges of manslaughter and other charges in the July, 2000 death of John Elliott in a drunken driving accident. Powell, 40, was not directly involved in the accident. He wasn't behind the wheel, wasn't a passenger in either of the vehicles involved, and was not charged with drunken driving. However, his friend Michael Pangle was.

Hours before the fatal accident, Pangle had been arrested for driving while intoxicated and had a blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit in New Jersey. Powell was called by the New Jersey State Police to pick up Pangle. Powell drove Pangle back to Pangle's car and that was the last time he saw him alive. Shortly afterward, Pangle, still intoxicated, drove his car head on into John Elliott's vehicle, killing himself, Elliott and injuring Elliott's girlfriend.

Is Powell responsible for the accident? Should he have been charged criminally for not preventing Pangle from driving while still intoxicated? Are the police officers the ones to blame for letting Pangle out of their custody?¹

Mentees please ask mentors: What internships did you complete during high school and college? What do you do to stay healthy since you are in a stressful profession? What newspapers/magazines do you read weekly?

Many of our participants looked forward to discussing our weekly topics in their correspondence. The students especially enjoy seeing their

¹ John Elliott's death prompted the New Jersey Legislature to pass a new measure, called "John's Law" in honor of John Elliot, in April 2001. The law allows police to hold drunken drivers' cars for 12 hours before allowing them to reclaim their vehicles, and calls on state police to fully inform parties who pick up drunken drivers of the ramifications and consequences they would face if they put the driver back behind the wheel.

mentors' analysis of the issues despite their differing opinions.

The participants have three mandatory face-to-face meetings at the Miami Senior High School library. These meetings involve all participants in the program as well as members of the school faculty. Well known guest speakers join the participants for a working lunch/party. These guest speakers briefly talk to the group about mentoring and other topics. The speakers conclude their remarks by taking questions from the students. Our guest speakers have included Florida Supreme Court Justice R. Fred Lewis. The meetings last for two hours. At least an hour is reserved for students to interact with their mentors privately.

The first meeting is an orientation and formal introductions gathering at the start of the program. A mid-year meeting and an end-of-the-school-year dinner party conclude the program. The students' parents receive invitations to attend the second and third meetings. The first meeting does not include parents to prevent inhibiting the participants' comfort levels while getting to know each other. In the event that the participants or parents request additional face-to-face meetings, advance permission must be obtained from the program coordinators. These meetings must be in the Miami Senior High School library and the Lead Teacher of the magnet program, or his faculty must be present throughout these discussions depending on the reason for the meeting.

By popular demand, we added additional opportunities for the participants to meet face to face. We planned a "town meeting." This meeting will consist of a moderated discussion/debate at the school designed to promote interest in current events and recruit new students for our program next year. In addition, the DCBA YLS planned field trips to a local law school and to Dade County Courthouse to watch a portion of a trial.

In order to oversee efficiently the program, the DCBA YLS created a steering committee consisting of three lawyers. Each committee member closely monitors the progress and success of eight mentoring relationships. This is discussed in greater detail in Section VI.

III. Decision Making Process

Two coordinators run the program. One coordinator is a young lawyer and the other is the lead teacher of the magnet program. Together, they administer the program and yet seek advice from the steering committee as to issues dealing with a particular mentoring relationship. Thus far, sporadic difficulties with communication due to computer problems have been the main obstacle we have encountered. Overall, the program has run very smoothly.

The DCBA YLS Board of Directors approved the program. The advisory board to the magnet program that consists of the school principal, assistant principal and various local officials including members of the legal community also approved the program. When enacting this type of program,

an affiliate needs to be conscious of its potential liability for any type of incident. Therefore, it is wise to restrict all face to face meetings to group settings on school grounds under supervised conditions. If field trips are utilized, the transportation and supervision issues should be left to the school officials to resolve pursuant to school policies.

IV. Considerations In Project Planning

A. Community Resources

The DCBA YLS and the Miami Senior High School Legal and Public Affairs Magnet work closely together to run the program. This was easily arranged since the program coordinators previously worked together in establishing the school's magnet program. It is helpful, yet not essential, for an affiliate to have some familiarity with the selected school prior to developing an ementoring program. An affiliate need not partner with any other organizations since local law firms will provide funding. See IV.C.

B. Personnel

The DCBA YLS ementoring program is a project of our very popular DCBA YLS Schools Committee. All of the lawyers are volunteers from this committee or are friends of committee members. The lawyers receive pro-bono credit for their volunteer hours through the "Put Something Back" program, a joint pro-bono project of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit and the Dade County Bar Association.

We also receive assistance from an employee at the school who works part time for the lead teacher of the magnet program. This employee sees the students almost daily and facilitates communication between the program coordinators, steering committee, and students when problems arise. This employee serves as our "eyes and ears" at the school. This has been vital to our success.

In order to increase the number of participants next year, advertisements in the local bar newspaper and bulk emails will be sent to enlist additional volunteers. Getting volunteers has not been a problem since the program offers lawyers a rewarding way to get close to a student while simultaneously receiving pro-bono credit. Again, the lawyers rarely have to leave their offices to make a significant impact on a student's life. The time commitment involved can be anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour per week depending on the relationship developed between the participants. This weekly interaction, combined with three mandatory two-hour meetings during the school year, should not intimidate any interested lawyer.

C. Revenue Availability/Fund raising

The budget for the entire program is approximately \$1500.00. This money covers the cost of the program materials, t-shirts for all

participants, as well as food and drinks for the group meetings and field trips. Local law firms donated all of the money. These firms received publicity in various articles that have been written about the program. The firms are also listed on the back of the t-shirts. One of the great advantages of this program is that there are no costs to the school or to the students in order to participate. Since the group uses the school library for the group meetings, we have not incurred costs associated with renting facilities, media equipment, and other related expenses. We have begun to request additional funding from local foundations and corporations to assist with our projected expansion for next year.

D. Equipment/Physical Needs

The students who volunteered to be in the program agreed to utilize the computers at school and/or their home computers. An affiliate needs to be aware of the computer equipment available to students at a given school prior to selecting that school to develop the program. An mentoring program will certainly fail if the students do not have sufficient access to email. All of the equipment needed for the group meetings is available at the school including tables, chairs, podiums, video equipment, and other miscellaneous equipment.

V. Implementation...How to replicate your project

A. Timetable

An affiliate should begin planning an mentoring program three (3) months in advance.

Three months prior to inception

1. Identify two coordinators to lead the project (once an affiliate chooses a school the lead teacher or other school representative should become the third coordinator)
2. Read about other mentoring programs on the internet (www.youthtrust.org, www.telementor.org, www.serviceleader.org) and then prepare a written manual which lists your mission statement, goals, objectives, training materials, rules, safety procedures, evaluation procedures, budget (the DCBA YLS manual will be available for guidance.)
3. Choose an established committee from your affiliate to help run your program (your "schools committee" is a great place to start).
4. Present your program to your board of directors or similar group, which will authorize the project and maybe even help with the initial funding.
5. Spread the word about the new program and start lining up lawyer volunteers.

Two months prior to inception

1. Choose a legal magnet or comparable high school that you wish to work with.
2. Identify your contact person (and third program coordinator) at the school. Have at least two meetings with your school contact to clarify all of the rules and details associated with your program. Give careful thought to the size of the program.
3. Get your program (presented in writing) approved by the appropriate school officials.
4. Have your school contact schedule a meeting so you can speak with students interested in participating. This is a great time to answer their questions.
5. Get your program approved by the appropriate bar organization so the lawyers will receive pro-bono credit for their efforts.
6. Select lawyers for your steering committee to help oversee the program. (Each lawyer on the committee should be responsible for eight to ten relationships.)

One month prior to inception

1. Finalize your list of lawyer volunteers, and mail them application forms and training materials.
2. Schedule a training session for the lawyers.
3. Plan your opening event.
4. Have all appropriate paper work completed including parent permission forms by the students and profiles containing background information on the participants to be exchanged during your initial introductions.
5. Arrange for a well-known guest speaker (consider a judge) to participate in your opening event.
6. Finalize your funding for the program.
7. Order food and drinks for the opening event. Schedule this event on a Friday at lunchtime.

B. Recruitment and Training of Volunteers/Personnel

As to getting volunteers see Section IV(b). Our lawyers received their training materials in the mail. Our training materials will be available to other affiliates. The lawyers were responsible for reading the materials carefully. In the ten (10) days leading up to the opening event, email announcements that highlighted the most important rules and guidelines were sent to all of our mentors. It is important to get at least five extra male and five extra female mentors to have ready to take over should a lawyer need to withdraw from your program. An affiliate may wish to have a formal training meeting for all mentors just before the program begins. This can be useful depending on your time limitations.

C. Publicity

An affiliate should alert its local bar newspaper and television news education reporters of your new program. This should be done at least two weeks prior to the opening event and is easily accomplished via email. Invite a reporter or two to attend your opening event. The news media is

very supportive of mentoring programs and is especially interested in young professionals utilizing technology to make advancements in education. This publicity will be helpful in raising money for your program and will also be welcomed by the school.

The DCBA YLS ementoring program has received both local and national recognition. Our program has been featured on the local evening news and in several publications including *The Miami Herald*, *Law Matters* and *The Affiliate* from the American Bar Association, and *The Florida Bar News*. Copies of our articles are available upon request.

D. Day to Day Operations

The DCBA YLS ementoring program operates throughout the school year. Our operations are discussed at length in Section II.B.1.b.

VI. Evaluation and Impact

In order to oversee efficiently the program, the program coordinators created a steering committee consisting of three lawyers. This committee closely monitors the progress and success of the mentoring relationships and is available for consultation and guidance should the need arise.

The lawyers on the steering committee are each responsible for monitoring the success of eight relationships. Mentors must check in with their steering committee member once a week (Fridays) to confirm that communication with the student occurred that week. Kids who are not taking advantage of the program know they will be removed because there is a waiting list to get in the program.

Periodically, all participants complete one-page evaluation forms and submit the forms to the program coordinators. These formal evaluations, combined with the participants' responses to questions sent randomly via email, allow the program coordinators and steering committee to stay informed as to the success of the ementoring relationships. This information is kept confidential and used solely to improve the program.

The program has been very successful. Mentors have stated the following:

"This program has been very rewarding. I feel like I am helping someone get a head start in life. So many times students are not given enough information about the real world and I would like to think I am helping her. We have already started discussing such things as the importance of a good GPA and the availability of scholarships."

"This is brilliant. It doesn't take a huge chunk out of the day, but at the same time you can get close to someone."

"We have a lot in common. We enjoy the same foods

and movies. We also discuss sports. He is a smart kid and I hope to help him in whatever decisions he needs help with."

"I enjoy the break in the day that allows me to communicate with someone who is not an opponent or co-worker. It is always nice to step away from one's daily routine and gain some perspective by hear opinions and questions from someone at an entirely different place in life than me."

"I definitely think xxxxx is taking advantage of the program. She routinely asks for my opinion or viewpoint about either her studies or the topic of the week. I truly hope she is benefiting even half as much as me."

"The most enjoyable thing is the actual communication. I love receiving emails from xxxx. I love to challenge him to take contrary positions. I enjoy knowing that he is having fun and learning at the same time."

Likewise, mentees benefited from the experience:

". . . I am more than happy with the way that the program has been going. Everything is perfect and I've been communicating with my mentor about 2 or 3 times a week, he's a great guy. So far we've discussed sports (the World Series and football) and school. I think that the program doesn't need any improvements, from what I've noticed, this program seems to be the most prosperous venture that the magnet program has taken . . ."

"I'm really enjoying the program and trying to get as much as I can from it. Me and my mentor are becoming very close friends. We write a minimum once a week and talk about everything and about the topics."

"Well of course I enjoy the program. I mean, how can I not. It is great. You really help me with a lot of things. I am grateful to be in this program."

"Being matched up with someone who is in the field of work that you want to go into is genius. It's like having a friend that can tell you anything that you want to know about law. I personally love law, so this program is ideal for me."

"I have learned from my mentor that you can have a family and be a lawyer without a problem. At first

I was worried that if I become a lawyer I wouldn't be able to have a family."

"I feel I can talk to my ementor just about anything. We communicate two to three times a week, even more when possible. I think having my ementor is really worthwhile."

The program has certainly had a significant impact on the lives of our participants. In addition, as a result of the newspaper articles, several organizations contacted us seeking to duplicate or devise similar programs. These groups included: (1) a local law school that wishes to pair law students with high school students; (2) a local high school and two high schools in Virginia that want to connect students with alumni; and (3) the Florida Bar that intends to have older lawyers mentor lawyers who are new to the practice. The efficiency and flexibility of telementoring should serve all of these groups well.

VII. Bibliography/Other Resources

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