

Award Title

An Innovative Approach to Address Financial Literacy on Campus: The SHSU Student Money Management Center

Awards Categories

Student Health, Wellness, Counseling, and related

Executive Summary

A large percentage of the SHSU student population, approximately 72%, receives financial aid. Of those students receiving financial aid, an overwhelming majority are using federal student loans to pay for their college education.

SHSU Student Services personnel realized this fact, as well as the national college trend of increasing student debt. Many of these students are using student loans for more than just their education or living expenses while in college. Students often use their student loan refund money to go on trips, shopping sprees, purchase new cars, electronics, and other items beyond their means. In addition, students were opening and using multiple credit cards.

In 2007, SHSU decided to look into creating a proactive solution to the student issues stated above. The thought was twofold in this effort; first financial issues are a major cause of student dropout rates, and secondly they wished to expand on its innovative, quality programs for SHSU students.

Through a collaborative partnership with Student Services, Academic Affairs, & Enrollment Management and support from the Texas State University System, the SHSU Student Money Management Center (SMMC) a full service financial literacy education program opened its doors on October 1, 2008.

The center, one of the first of its kind at the collegiate level, is a financial outreach and educational program administered by the Division of Student Services. The center was founded in an effort to combat financial illiteracy and the growing amounts of debt among SHSU students.

The SMMC's comprehensive mission is to improve the financial well-being of our students by providing unbiased education, preventive and intervention counseling, financial tools, and solutions students need in order to achieve financial independence.

The learning objectives of the SMMC are (1) help student develop a realistic understanding of their financial situation; (2) develop an appropriate budget and spending plan to meet their needs; (3) learn how to understand, establish, and maintain good credit (i.e. credit score); (4) plan for life and financial obligations while in college and beyond; and (5) develop savings and retirement planning strategies once they graduate and obtain employment.

The SMMC offers financial literacy outreach to our students in the form of e-learning modules (KatCents), webinars, podcasts, seminars, workshops, collaborative classroom presentations, campus radio and television segments, and one-on-one professional and peer counseling.

Topics discussed throughout each of these outreach programs include but are not limited to the following: Budgeting, Good Credit vs. Bad Credit, Understanding Credit Scores and Credit Reports, Identity Theft Protection and Cyber Security, Saving and Investing, Retirement Planning, Insurance, Financial Goal Setting, Starting Your Own Small Business, Debt Management, and Financial Aid.

Award Description

RELEVANCE TO INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

Sam Houston State University (SHSU), a small regional state college located in Huntsville, Texas was founded in 1879. The college now boasts a student population of approximately 17,000. The University's mission is to provide high quality education, scholarship, and service to students and to regional, state, national, and international constituencies and our motto is, "The Measure of a Life is its Service."

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DEMONSTRATION OF ADDRESSING STUDENT NEEDS/CRITICAL CAMPUS ISSUES

In a society where the average individual has a zero savings rate, consumer debt is more prevalent than assets, bankruptcy is at an all time high, and the national debt is in the trillions (Gentry, 2007), why should the debt among college students be important? Why do university administrators need to be concerned with the amount of credit card and student loan debt owed by college students?

With the increasing cost of a college education outpacing the inflation rate (National Education Association Research Center, 2003), the economy demanding a more educated workforce (Thomas & Perna, 2004), financial aid awards decreasing, and debt levels increasing faster than the cost of tuition (Swarthout, 2006), it is important for college administrators to address the long term financial, psychological, and academic risks associated with the increased responsibility of personal debt associated with the pursuit of a college degree (King, 1997; Lacewell, 2006).

SHSU decided to look into creating a proactive solution to combating the aforementioned financial issues facing our students today. The thought was twofold in this effort; first financial issues are a major cause of student dropout rates, and secondly they wished to expand on its innovative, quality programs for SHSU students.

In primary and secondary research conducted by SHSU educators and staff in 2007, the article "A College Financial Management Center: What Do Students Think?" published by Slate & Vienne (2008) in the International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation stated, "...it is clear to us that financial management is a concern among college/university students." The researchers also found that "...universities and colleges should provide students with the access to facilities, education, and assessment on financial money management training."

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The SMMC also works with underprivileged, low-income and first generation college students through their collaboration with Project Connect and TRIO on SHSU's campus. These federally funded programs through the Department of Education provide services designed to assist these students in their pursuit of higher education. The SMMC provides the financial literacy component to their learning and has helped students from this program become financially stable and able to stay in school to complete their degree. Each professional counselor on staff is certified through both AFCPE and/or the Institute for Financial Literacy. Peer counselors on staff go through an extensive training program provided by the professional staff members as well as certified marriage and family therapists on staff at the University. Thus, all financial counselors at the SMMC are trained in both counseling techniques and financial topics.

COLLABORATIVE EVENTS

In addition to the staff providing workshops, seminars, classroom presentations, and other outreach, the SMMC has hosted many individuals who are experts in their perspective fields. Representatives from the IRS, Texas Department of Banking, Federal Reserve, Department of Education, U.S. Treasury, Texas Association of CPA's and Consumer Credit Counseling Services and many others have participated in SMMC events.

Each month, the SMMC, in collaboration with other divisions, including Academic Affairs, Information Resources, and Enrollment Management hosts several financial education programs for the entire campus community. The popular Lunch-Skills Series provides a wonderful opportunity for students to learn money management and other financial literacy knowledge and skills during their lunch break. The Financially Fit Bootcamp is a six-week program of total financial literacy immersion. Students gain immense knowledge during these interactive, fun and informative sessions. Students really “Commit to Be Fit.” Residence Halls, Greek Life, and other campus organizations frequently request workshops and presentations by the SMMC’s peer counselors known as the Kat2Kats. They are Bearkats (the SHSU mascot) helping fellow Bearkats become financially independent.

ORIGINALITY & CREATIVITY

Financial Literacy Week is really the flagship event for the SMMC. This week-long series of events is held annually during the last week of February.

Not only does the SMMC bring in experts in their financial fields, the center also collaborates with local community financial service businesses, as well as on-campus resources (Financial Aid, Scholarships Office, Health Center, Counseling Services, Student Activities) and other university student financial management centers in the state. Over 1,000 students have participated each year in this annual event.

In addition to students learning through their participation in SMMC events, they also earn prizes such as scholarships. Each year the center has awarded three \$650 scholarships to student participants during Financial Literacy Week. These scholarships were funded by local Huntsville, Texas area businesses who wanted to sponsor Financial Literacy Week. Students also have the ability to earn prize money for their registered student campus organizations. The organization with the most members in attendance for the week will win \$1,000 for their organization, second place wins \$750, and third place wins \$500. Competitions among residence halls during this week are also exciting. The residence hall with the most students in attendance at our Financial Literacy Week events wins \$1,000 to purchase computers, software, and other programming materials for their hall.

EFFECTIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The SMMC, in collaboration with HigherOne, brought innovative, interactive financial education services to Sam Houston students by developing KatCents, an online financial literacy gaming program. This revolutionary product teaches students through electronic channels, allowing students to access valuable financial information anytime, anywhere.

This new product also allows the SMMC to provide its financial literacy programs and services to distance learners through a co-branded website or even an e-college or Blackboard course.

Additionally, the SMMC regularly hosts small events to educate student on financial literacy including “Kat Cab”, CashCourse Carnival, Student Services Day, and Encuentro. These events are great opportunities to market the center and its services, as well as provide financial

education in a non-lecture format. Fun games such as Financial Jeopardy, Trivia Quiz Wheel, and Plinko are also excellent ways to engage the students and teach them financial literacy. Students answer questions concerning personal finances and receive prizes for correct answers. SMMC logoed shirts, pens, mugs, lunch coolers, and recycled grocery bags are common gifts and all have an underlying financial education component as well. Personal finance literature is also provided.

EDUCATING EMPLOYEES: LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

In addition, the Student Money Management Center seeks to educate their office student workers, graduate assistants and peer counselors during their employment with the center. An employment entrance and exit survey are conducted with each student employee to determine their satisfaction with their time with the SMMC, as well as what they have learned while working in our office. Time management, personal finance management, communication, collaboration, customer service and leadership are just a few of the areas SMMC student employees have indicated their increase in knowledge and skills. Student employees are encouraged to take ownership of their projects, programs, and services they provide. This empowerment and involvement by student peers has helped to build a truly student centered financial education program at SHSU.

GRANT FUNDING & RESEARCH

The SMMC was awarded a Texas Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators (TACUSPA) research grant for the 2010-2011 academic year. The grant will allow the SMMC the ability to provide a financial literacy experience for low-socioeconomic undergraduate students at Sam Houston State University. The research will coalesce two fields of study: education and financial literacy. A mixed method design will measure the affect of the Kat Cents platform, which explains the core concepts of financial literacy, on low socioeconomic students. The following questions will be addressed in this study: 1. What is the effect of personal demographic characteristics on the financial literacy among participants? 2. What is the effect of gender on financial literacy among participants? 3. What is the effect of ethnicity on financial literacy among participants? 4. What financial literacy practices or beliefs changed among participants due to participation in the Kat Cents program?

EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Since the SHSU Student Money Management Center opened in October 2008, the center has seen a constant and rapid increase of student usage of the center and its services. This increase has led the SMMC to add office space, staff and hours of availability for students. The Sam Houston State University Student Money Management Center is looking forward to a bright future, and is proud of its many accomplishments and impact on student learning in its short time of existence.

Assessment Data ASSESSMENT DATA

In 2007 a qualitative study by Vienne & Slate (2008) was conducted prior to the development of the SMMC to gauge the interest and need for a personal financial management center on SHSU's campus. Three major themes emerged from that research, including identification that (1) students need help developing a personal budget, (2) students had a strong desire for a sense of financial independence; and (3) students had a need to develop a level of personal responsibility and maintain a better grasp on their impulse spending habits and non-essential purchases.

With this research as an underlying foundation, SHSU developed a comprehensive program proposal by which to base the SHSU Student Money Management Center. Since opening its doors in October 2008, over 3,000 students have participated in SMMC events.

Since its implementation, the SMMC has developed a strategic assessment program to consistently and strategically assess the center's effectiveness and student learning through the programs and services it provides to the campus community.

Assessment data is collected through (a) student satisfaction surveys, (b) speaker effectiveness response cards collected during programs, (c) round table discussions and focus groups with student leaders and student organizations; and, (d) pre-test/post-test assessments are the primary methods of assessing effectiveness and student learning objectives for the SMMC.

The impact of the SMMC is evaluated for effectiveness through a series of assessment practices including a follow-up survey after each consultation/counseling session. Additionally, at the end of the Financial Literacy week, a comprehensive survey is sent to participants to verify whether the programs intended learning outcomes were achieved. From both of these current assessment practices, students have indicated both an increase in knowledge and increased comfort levels with the financial literacy information.

College administrators need to have a better understanding with regard to the impact that student debt has on lower socioeconomic students, first generation college students, and on those students without adequate family social capital. Though the topic of debt is commonly discussed, little research has been conducted to determine the factors that influence debt and the characteristics that are associated with undergraduate student debt levels. Additionally, little research is available to help administrators understand the influence that full financial aid packages have on persistence levels among undergraduates and the types of programs that can be instituted to help reduce the amount of debt that college students incur during the pursuit of a degree.

Therefore, longitudinal studies are currently being developed between our institution and other institutions in the state to better gauge the long term impact the SMMC has on our students and provide a framework for future researchers and campus administrators looking to develop similar programs or services on their campuses.