Award Title

Team QUEST: Experience-Based Training & Development

Awards Categories

Athletics, Recreation, Physical Fitness, Non-Varsity Sports and related

Executive Summary

Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand.
~Chinese Proverb

In the early 1980s David Kolb developed a theory named “Experiential Learning” to explain the relationship between learning and student development in higher education (Kolb, 1981). Specifically, Kolb (1981) posited that the learning process is a four-stage cycle consisting of concrete experience (a feeling dimension), reflective observation (a watching dimension), abstract conceptualization (a thinking dimension), and active experimentation (a doing dimension). In general, learners will choose which abilities to employ when they encounter learning opportunities, and most will have a ‘default,’ or preference for one over the other four. However, “to be effective, learners need the abilities represented by each of the four components of this learning cycle” (Evans, 1998, p. 209). Unfortunately, most colleges and universities are unable to offer students such a fully integrated learning experience. Team QUEST, a program housed on a 40-acre campus near The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, strives to complete the learning cycle by providing experiential educational opportunities to UNCG students, faculty, staff, and the greater Piedmont community in its unique, woodland setting.

“Experiential education is both a philosophy and a methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education, 2010). Specifically, experiential learning transpires when carefully selected activities are followed by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis (AEE, 2010). All activities undertaken by groups who visit Team QUEST are specifically designed and conducted so as to engage the learner in just such direct experiences. Immediately following an activity, Team QUEST’s carefully trained facilitators guide learners in reflective conversation in order to draw learning from the experience and to understand how this learning can be transferred to the group’s typical environment. The experience allows students to engage fully with all four stages of Kolb’s learning cycle which, in turn, gives them the opportunity to strengthen learning styles they might not otherwise use. Thus, Team QUEST is particularly valuable to non-traditional learners, for “if academic disciplines are to be accessible to students with diverse learning styles, efforts must be made to provide varied methods of instruction and evaluation” (Evans, 1998, p. 213).

Team QUEST’s dedication to positive educational outcomes is evidenced by its accreditation by AEE in 2010. (It is only the 11th institution of higher education to receive accreditation nationwide.) The recent addition of a two-level high challenge course, an annual coordination of presenters discussing experiential education’s relationship to social justice, its active role in
UNCG’s transitional programs for at-risk and international students, as well as its meticulously tailored programs suited to individual groups and their goals, all underscore Team QUEST’s unique place in UNCG and the greater Piedmont area of North Carolina. Team QUEST helps UNCG fulfill its educational mission by attending to the whole student. In turn, this helps UNCG facilitate a comprehensive educational experience for its students, yielding positive learning outcomes.

**Award Description**

The mission of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is to “redefine the public research university for the 21st century as an inclusive, collaborative, and responsive institution making a difference in the lives of students and the communities it serves” (UNCG Office of the Chancellor, 2009). Specifically, UNCG strives to be a “learner-centered, accessible, and inclusive community fostering intellectual inquiry to prepare students for meaningful lives and engaged citizenship” (UNCG Office of the Chancellor, 2009). Team QUEST helps the university accomplish these goals in several ways, simultaneously making a direct and positive impact on students’ learning, wellness and ultimately, retention via experiential educational opportunities.

First and foremost, Team QUEST furthers UNCG’s educational goals by providing its participants, students, faculty, and staff singular learning opportunities rooted in experiential education philosophy and methodologies. The intention of these programs is to help participants develop healthier relationships (including relationship to self, relationship to other, relationship to the organization) through experiential educational opportunities that have an intentional educational focus. Direct experience is the main curricular method for learning. Team QUEST offers many creative programs that promote the development of both individuals and groups. The experiential programs may include the utilization of low-challenge course elements, ground-based team initiatives, orienteering team challenges, high-challenge courses, mobile programming (indoor or outdoor), or other custom programming options. The educational experience is structured to allow the learners to take initiative, pose questions, solve problems, demonstrate curiosity, exercise creativity, be flexible, experiment, and, ultimately, construct meaning from the experience.

The programs offered at Team QUEST are tailored according to the educational needs and goals of each particular group served. Before Team QUEST plans the experience for each group, the student/client completes a needs assessment, a program development questionnaire, and/or a participant expectations document in order for the facilitators to gain a better understanding of what the organization is hoping to accomplish with their Team QUEST experience. Team QUEST facilitators subsequently design the program according to the information provided by the group. Possible outcomes from our programs include, but are not limited to: increased team performance, enhanced sense of trust and support, improved communication skills, developed leadership, increased problem solving skills, and meaningful connection to academic course material. These outcomes often foster students’ greater sense of belonging within the larger UNCG community.

Team QUEST also helps facilitate the university’s intent to make a difference in the wider community. While it primarily serves UNCG students, faculty, and staff, Team QUEST has the
privilege of acting as a link between UNCG, other regional institutions of higher learning, and the surrounding community. Specifically, Team QUEST helps to maintain connections with students after graduation by offering services to alumni and friends of the university through their community agencies or corporations. Team QUEST also promotes collaboration between regional colleges and universities by functioning as a UNCG-affiliated program that works directly with students and groups from nearby schools such as North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T), Greensboro College, Bennett College, and Salem College. In addition, Team QUEST fosters collaboration between UNCG and the surrounding world by facilitating programs for community groups as well as corporations on a sliding-scale fee. The businesses who regularly take advantage of Team QUEST’s distinctive educational opportunities include American Express, BB&T, Moses Cone Health Systems, Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, and Polo Ralph Lauren, just to name a few. The direct connections between Team QUEST and alumni, other colleges and universities, and both community and corporate groups help to strengthen ties to the university while simultaneously offering a unique and valuable service beyond the traditional campus experience.

Not surprisingly, Team QUEST also has strong partnerships with other departments and programs within UNCG, including those featured in this particular award category. For example, Team QUEST provides annual programming for academic programs from the Bryan School of Business, the College of Education, the department of Counseling and Educational Development, and Communication Studies, just to name a few. In addition, Team QUEST has a prominent presence in the curriculum of the freshman UNS (University Studies) classes. They regularly host interns and observers, provide programs for athletic teams, participate in research efforts, and are involved with the Summer Launch program, which helps at-risk students transition smoothly from high school into the college experience. On the co-curricular side, Team QUEST is a part of the annual training for all Resident Advisors (R.A.s) in Housing and Residence Life on campus and is an integral part of the curriculum for student leadership training within the Office of Leadership and Service Learning.

While there are similar experiential education programs on other college campuses across the nation, none are quite like Team QUEST. What makes Team QUEST so special is its unparalleled combination of physical, natural, and human resources. Team QUEST was recently accredited by the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) and is only the 11th university-based program to achieve accreditation in the country. In their final report on Team QUEST, the Accreditation Review Team noted the aspects of this experiential educational program that set it apart. Specifically, they recognized how Team QUEST developed a culture that values personal responsibility, supportive interactions, and a commitment to quality; how organization and intentionality are evident in all facets of Team QUEST’s operations, from gear care and storage to staff training and program planning; how the staff is extremely professional and conducts their work with deliberateness, care, and thoughtfulness; and finally, how Team QUEST’s commitment to creating meaningful educational experiences for their participants is self-evident to all involved. Recognition at a national level signifies the extent of the value, intentionality, and quality of the experiential educational Team QUEST program at UNCG.

Team QUEST is also unique in that it strives to reach beyond the experiential campus and give back to the UNCG community in tangible ways, such as the annual Rebecca L. Carver Institute
on Experiential Education and Social Justice. This workshop, which is a collaborative effort between Team QUEST and the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations, invites presenters each year to UNCG to discuss experiential learning and how it applies to social justice. Prior years have focused on topics such as “How to Facilitate Cultural Competence in Education” and “How to Create Equitable Leadership in Experiential Education.” The goal of these workshops is to raise awareness of the impact experiential educational philosophies and methodologies can have not only on student development, but also on the world more broadly.

In sum, Team QUEST is a special, vital part of the UNCG experience. It furthers the University’s mission and helps address the needs of the whole student; it enables its participants to strengthen non-dominant learning styles, while allowing non-traditional learners the opportunity to shine; its wide variety of programming options facilitates virtually unlimited learning outcomes; it helps foster connections with other colleges and universities as well as with businesses in the greater Piedmont region; it collaborates with myriad departments on campus; and it reaches out to the broader intellectual community through social justice workshops. Team QUEST provides its participants the opportunity to refine communication skills, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and build teamwork in a supportive, educational environment. In so doing, it makes a positive impact on student learning and success at UNCG.

Assessment Data

Participant program evaluations consistently indicate strong student/user satisfaction and value for Team QUEST programs. Based on a 7-point Likert scale, in the academic year 2009-2010, participants rated the overall Team QUEST experience a 6.28 and the importance of the skills learned there a 6.17.

Over the last ten years of programming, Team QUEST has served over 650 groups from UNCG, signifying an impact made on over 12,200 students. Of these 650-plus groups, almost two-thirds were academic in nature, including participants from the freshman UNS 101 seminars. Significant numbers of students from athletic groups participated as well. Faculty and staff were also well represented; over 624 employees of UNCG took advantage of Team QUEST. These statistics also reflect Team QUEST’s dedication to outreach programming and community involvement. The total number of community groups (including corporations, community organizations, and other institutions of higher education) served in the past decade was 446, for a total of over 11,100 participants. The vast majority of community participants were either youth groups or corporations, both of which stand to make a significant impact on the community at large following their Team QUEST learning experience. In total, Team QUEST served over 1,000 groups and 26,600 individuals in the last ten years.