

2017

Inspire-On: Stereotype Threat Taught as a Motivation for College/Success

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Recommended Citation

Concepcion, Benjamin and Maack, Coral, "Inspire-On: Stereotype Threat Taught as a Motivation for College/Success" (2017). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 584.

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Coral Maack, my honors sponsor, and I are both passionate about diversity and inclusion for underrepresented populations. Our shared interest led to the creation of, “Inspire-On: Stereotype Threat Taught as a Motivation for College/Success”.

The impact that stereotype threat had on me almost stopped me from achieving my dream. I dreamed of studying abroad, but before I even stepped into the international office to talk about the opportunity, I told myself many times why am I even trying. Being low income and Latino, studying abroad was not something that fit my identity’s stereotyped behavior. Had I not been educated on stereotype threat and been encouraged by faculty, I would have missed out on a life changing opportunity.

Coral recruits and makes the admission decisions for students from Providence and the surrounding area for the University of Rhode Island (URI). One of the barriers to a higher education for students in this area is the college preparatory units that students take during their high school career. Without the proper courses students are not admissible to most traditional colleges and universities, which drastically limits their opportunities.

Malcolm Gladwell’s podcast Revisionist History episode titled, “*Carlos’ Story*” tells the story of a student with extreme potential, but because of the circumstances of his environment it is difficult for him to achieve success. He is an amazing student despite all the life obstacles he faces. What Carlos needs like many students who come from these backgrounds is an advocate. This podcast was the catalyst that propelled us to combine our passion and knowledge into action and led to the creation of presentations and workshops for middle school students in the Providence area. Students who attend this school district are typically low-income, first generation, students of color, who often face stereotype threat on a daily basis. Our goal was to educate students about stereotype threat, inspire them to believe in themselves and their abilities, while educating them about the courses that they need in order to keep all of their options open upon graduating from high school. We encouraged them to “dream big”.

The presentation included:

- Defining stereotype threat
- Stereotype Threat activity identifying stereotypes of identity groups and individuals who have broken free from them.
- Stories from URI student leaders who succeed in breaking their stereotypes
- Dream activity- getting the students to draw their biggest dreams
- Relating their dreams to the potential need for higher education or training
- Introducing college preparatory courses
- Inspiring students to believe that their success is in their hands

We presented at Broadway, Nathanael Greene and Esek Hopkins middle schools in Providence. We also presented to the RAM for a day high school students at URI and middle schools students in URI’s SMILE program.

Our sessions had an immediate impact based on the feedback we received from the students following the presentations and workshops. They spoke about their own stereotypes and the impact it has had on them. This insight will help them identify stereotype threats, which will then allow them to begin to expand their identities positively like I have. Also, once they enter high school in the fall they will have an

understanding of the college preparatory courses needed to attend college if that is something they wish to pursue.

Learning outcomes:

- Learn how to give back to my community.
- Learn how to collaborate with others.
- Learn the skill to set a vision and manifest it.
- Learn to plan and facilitate an event.
- Learn to use what I have learned from an experience and teach it to others in a different way.