*School of Government and Public Policy*

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HSI Essay Competition

Title: Innovation to Unleash Hispanic Excellence

Innovation to Unleash Hispanic Excellence

In 2021, I was awarded the Dorrance Scholarship. Amongst the financial assistance I have received from this scholarship, I have also received many valuable educational experiences that I would have never even dreamt of as a Latina, first-generation student. One notable summer program I completed with the Dorrance Scholarship Program (DSP), which is the reason for my writing now, is what DSP calls the Innovation Program. Being a Hispanic student at the University of Arizona, I, myself, was unfamiliar with entrepreneurship and the many skills participating in this kind of program could award me. Most of all, I was unfamiliar with how to involve myself in this professional world. With that said, I believe that an innovation program at the University of Arizona would immensely help to better serve our Hispanic students.

My experience during the DSP Innovation Program is one that I genuinely believe more students should have the privilege of having. At first, I dreaded this program because all I knew about it was that it was required for me to renew my scholarship. As I reflect now, I completely agree this program should be a requirement for everyone during their collegiate education. The Innovation Program was a three-week summer program in which I took PAH420: Innovation and the Human Condition. Unlike traditional summer classes, this class was entirely based on one project where I would attempt to solve *happiness* in our community. After being assigned to a group with three other students, we worked together to create a non-profit organization that we named MAP, the Motherhood Assurance Program. In short, my group and I decided to serve our local immigrant community by providing lactation services for breastfeeding immigrant mothers. The specialness about this project was that we presented our projects at the Biosphere 2, Tucson Meet Yourself, and in front of a panel of professors and entrepreneurs who listened to our pitches and intended to possibly fund one of our projects. After my group won first place, that feeling of satisfaction and success was wonderful, it was empowering. In addition to the incredible opportunity for students to explore their creativity, this program allowed me to practice my public speaking, collaboration skills, problem-solving skills, and even how to dress myself in business professional attire. The benefits of this program are almost endless.

Although I do believe that programs like Project Outreach Familia and the Summer Research Institute are extremely beneficial to Hispanic students like myself, I do not think they are enough. The precise issue I see with Hispanic students’ success is the need to participate in programs that grant them experience, programs that give them something to put on their resume. This issue has long been one that DSP has been working toward, and I can confidently say that I would not be the student I am today without DSP. For this reason, I think the University of Arizona should strongly consider making these types of programs more accessible to all Hispanic students. More often than not, applying for internships or graduate school is difficult for students who lack experience and involvement. For Hispanic students in particular, being low-income and first-generation puts us at a disadvantage where we do not know what to do or where to look to help. In comparison to our peers who come from educated families, there is a large gap that has resulted in our constant setbacks. Since our university calls itself a Hispanic-serving institution, I think a large part of this implies support in the professional world.

For this type of program to be successful, I think that it all begins with increasing outreach to students. To be completely sincere, I was unaware that the University of Arizona was a Hispanic-serving institution until this September. Since I found out, I have talked to other students who have also shared the same surprise with me. However, I do not think this necessarily means that student outreach is unsuccessful, but rather that changing the way we communicate may help. Recently, the Guerrero Center has been actively hosting events for our Hispanic community like Encuentro which was centered around Hispanic Heritage Month. With this thought in mind, I would also like to say that I do not think the Hispanic serving ideal should only be celebrated during this time of year. From my perspective, I do think it seems like that sometimes; Committing to Hispanic excellence should be consistent. To solve this issue, I would suggest using the Guerrero Center to share information on not only student celebratory events and bonding but also information on how to shadow a professional and how to get an internship. For the sake of my writing, I would also emphasize the need for an innovation program where Hispanic students could work together as entrepreneurs and gain invaluable professional experience.

As a student studying Law and Spanish Translation and Interpretation, helping my Hispanic community is the sole reason for my studies. I have the goal of uplifting my community through excellence, and right now, I believe that excellence can only be achieved through more accessible professional development programs. I think that every student should experience wearing a suit and the nerve-racking feeling before presenting in front of a panel of judges. I think every student should experience the excitement of identifying an issue in our community and having the creative freedom to find a solution. As DSP has taught me, innovation is a field that helps any career choice flourish and I would like to share that with my peers. For me, this program instilled in me the opportunity to directly address a segment of our community that I am passionate about, our immigrant community. Similar to my idea, I could only imagine the many other ideas our Hispanic students could bring to the table. There is an incredible amount of hidden Hispanic excellence on our campus right now, we just need to unleash it.