APA Engagement

The planning department as a whole at East Carolina University certainly rises above many programs regarding their urgency and attentiveness to the importance of Student APA Engagement. Our relationships we have with our alumni are very special as they can preach to the students the importance, as well as the process of attaining one's APA membership, the community and connections it brings, and even tips on how to prepare for the AICP exam. These relationships are something that not many programs have, and the basis of the planning program as a whole is the continuance of these relationships to provide connections for current students to get as much benefit as possible.

As planning students are first brought into the program, they are urged to create their free membership on the APA website before scheduling for classes, which helps hold students accountable for creating their accounts, even before realizing the importance of APA itself. The importance of the creation of the account is stressed as if it is a mandatory assignment in the program in order to be a planning student. They are also urged to play a prominent role in the departmental student organization known as The Student Planners Action Network (SPAN). SPAN specifically extends a hand toward the importance of enrolling in the pilot program. The Pilot Program for students is an incredible opportunity as it creates the ability to get on the fast track to take the exam needed in attaining the AICP title as soon as possible after graduation. During our SPAN meetings, we also hold to make a point that everyone is signed up in order to attend the State APA Conferences which in turn help students create connections within the State of North Carolina, and sometimes beyond. By utilizing all of the tools provided to students through APA, there are ample opportunities to succeed and grow as an undergraduate planner to one day hold a position in the professional world.

Community Involvement/ Innovative Educational Programming

The Student Planners’ Action Network at East Carolina University has continued to strive for excellence since the beginning of time and it is evident by the eagerness displayed each year by the members, specifically when it comes to the participation in community outreach events. SPAN officers and members come together to organize dates and times periodically throughout the school year to ensure there is at least one monthly outreach event planned in some way. These outreach events include the maintenance of a city street, partaking in a yearly park clean-up, volunteering with the local science centers, and specifically volunteering with the youth in the community. The youth in the community hold a huge part in the organizations heart as they have played a huge role over the last few years with community involvement. SPAN realizes that the youth are the future and need to be educated in fun ways to help lead young students down the road of potentially becoming future urban planners, or leaders within communities through the United States.

SPAN has teamed up with the youth outreach program through the Greenville Police Department, known as the “Police Athletic League”, or “PAL”. PAL is a youth crime prevention program that utilizes educational, athletic and recreational activities to create trust and understanding between police officers and youth. These students range from ages 5 to 12 years old, which come from many different backgrounds, and attend South Greenville Elementary School which is a Title 1 school, located in a low-income neighborhood. The PAL program gives these children the opportunity to have something to do after school, while being supervised by an attentive staff that cares deeply for each and every student.

The Student Planners’ Action Network has been able to create fun and innovative educational ideas to the PAL program by coming to the site in South Greenville a few times a year. The activities we participate in with the children range from general mapping skills, and kid friendly GIS education through a PowerPoint presentation that looks like they are actually
using the ArcGIS application through their Smart Board; to relay races, in which the kids design their own cities. The thought processes these kids endure while creating their own cities is truly remarkable, especially as they share with us their reasoning behind why they included what they did in their city and elaborate on all the details that are actually extremely important in real life planning, like the inclusion of sidewalks. They don’t know why something like sidewalks are so important, but are further educated by the members of SPAN on fun-facts regarding what makes a city, a city. These students become so intrigued when learning about basic concepts they didn’t realize pertain to the field of planning, and also have fun during the process, so it is definitely a “win, win” for both the kids and SPAN members.

During our most recent afternoon with the students, a few SPAN members had noticed a huge decline in the number of students enrolled in the program compared to the last few years we have come to the site. Last year there were a little over 30 students enrolled in the PAL program (South Greenville Site, as there is another site on the other side of town), and this year there are only 18 students. Now, this drop is extremely significant, and we were enlightened that it was because of an increase in “tuition” from $50 per kid a ‘semester’, to $75 per kid a ‘semester’. To some people, they may think “$25 is nothing”, but to this community where there are many families working minimum wage jobs, or not working at all, with more than one child, it is a huge jump in price. SPANs involvement the last few years with this program has opened up the eyes to many of its members to the struggles neighborhoods face in the communities that surround our university, which is something a lot of students needed to see. We wanted to find a way to leave a mark for years to come, and to continue the PAL program specifically to help our local community as a whole by helping these children pave their way to a brighter future. The Student Planners Action Network decided to create a “PAL Scholarship Fund”, in which we have an account set aside, and we communicate with the PAL Officers regarding any student that may want to be in the PAL program but cannot afford to be. SPAN agreed to cover up anywhere from 25% to 50% of the “tuition” fee per child, and in some circumstances, the whole fee. This money in the account will continue to come from percentage nights the organization holds within local restaurants, as well as student dues into the organization. Though it is a lot of fundraising, we know that this is something we can say we started, and hope to see that account balance continue to grow over the years, as well as be used well, for years to come. SPAN truly cares about the community beyond our “college town”, and we want to see good people continue to rise above the standards set in the past. By starting with a portion of the youth in South Greenville, we believe the future is bright for every student and the City of Greenville.

Innovative Educational Programming

One of the major highlights we have been successfully offering is the Table Talk series. Since Fall 2017, we have invited alumni planners to share their experiences with students. Speakers were from various backgrounds in terms of specialty, geographic location, organization, ranking, and gender. The topics varied as well, which often reflected students’ interests and the trends in the profession. The highlight of the Table Talk series would be the mock interview that takes place at the end of the spring semester. Participating students must prepare a resume and be ready to answer sample questions that are often asked during a planning job interview. A one-to-one mock interview was offered for each student, followed by a reflective comment session with all interviewers and interviewees. All Table Talk series are organized together with the ECU Planning program for the benefits of our SPAN members.
Storytelling Media:

- PAL.png: An outreach action with the Greenville Police PAL program, March 24, 2019
- TableTalk_MockInterview.jpg: One of the Table Talk series in Spring 2019. Mock interviews for graduating seniors. Students were (mock) interviewed by professional planners and received critical comments on their resume, interview skills, and etiquette. March 14, 2019
- https://spark.adobe.com/page/L7QOGN5E6tRbH/: Our yearly SPAN newsletter composed of articles from students, alumni, and faculty members, October 8, 2019.