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**Overview & Observations**

In my limited time at the BAOBAB senior center in Ardmore, PA presenting as a member of the “multicultural showcase,” I had the opportunity to familiarize myself with the showcase program, the BAOBAB center, some of the staff, and some of the seniors in attendance. The program had undergone significant changes, as my companions and I were the first students in the program who were not volunteers, but there for a class requirement. A related complication was that their “multicultural showcase,” now no longer comprised of international students who sourced their material from their country of origin, had to undergo significant changes out of necessity.

Though we were theoretically supposed to complete roughly 20 hours in our placements, due to hazardous weather conditions, holidays, and other activities, my fellow students and I spent a total of about eight hours with the folks at BAOBAB. This includes a brief tour before we began our presentations, 30 minutes spent there before our five half-hour long presentations in which we did not often have the opportunity to interact with the seniors (due to other presentations during lunch, separate seating, and other reasons), and an activity that took place at our college as well. All told, about 4.5 of those hours were spent actually interacting with the BAOBAB seniors.

In discussion with my fellow student-presenters participating in this program, I compiled a list of suggestions regarding improvements to the multicultural showcase based off of our observations and the events we were involved in. My request for proposal speaks to some difficulties we as student presenters faced and observations, as well as some of the complications and desires as communicated by the BAOBAB seniors we presented to. I also acknowledge the limits of my involvement and knowledge; while the short time we spent at BAOBAB does not invalidate our experiences, it does limit them, which is important to note. I trust in the college PRAXIS and BAOBAB coordinators to make well-informed decisions on what they believe is best for the program participants from both institutions based on long-term knowledge that I have not yet acquired.

**Proposal**

The current multicultural showcase spans a half hour after lunch every Friday at the BAOBAB senior center. It is formatted as a lecture with the option of taking questions and/or becoming slightly more involved by taking senior volunteers out of the audience for more active demonstrations. Student presenters offered a number of possible topic they could individually lecture on with a brief description of content, and the college PRAXIS and BAOBAB coordinators decided on which they thought would be best suited for the final list of presentations.

To stay true to the multicultural showcase’s mission to expose BAOBAB members to new or unfamiliar aspects of their and other societies, while also changing certain aspects to make the showcase more user-friendly, I propose that the program undergo five changes. First, a longer timeframe; second, materials and topics taken from a process that takes into account suggestions from PALM members and the abilities of possible presenters; third, a greater number of potential speakers; fourth, a more engaging format; and finally, more material of a higher academic level.

**Reasoning**

Time: In the current system, the multicultural showcase takes place on Fridays after lunch from 12:30 – 1:30 PM. Between the time it takes for BAOBAB members to finish lunch, for presenters to set up, and for those not attending the showcase to leave the room, as well as leaving a few minutes for questions, the realistic amount of time each presenter has is roughly 20 minutes. The presentations feel rushed and are limited in the depth and breadth they are able to explore in each topic due to time constraints.

My suggestion is that if possible, the multicultural showcase should last one hour, with the ideal balance between activity and Q&A being divided into either two 30-minute segments, or 45 devoted to lecture / activity and 15 for questions. This would allow a more in-depth exploration of the day’s theme by nearly doubling the amount of time the speakers currently have, while also giving the seniors an opportunity to leave the room if they do not wish or don’t have time to stay for the question and answer section. Of course there does not need to be a “hard” line between two separate segments either, and there are other options that can be explored.

Topics: The subject matter of the showcase was entirely determined by students and staff. Student lecturers submitted a short list of topics to the college PRAXIS and BAOBAB coordinators, who selected the matters they felt were best suited to the seniors and showcase. However, this manner of deciding what to address is very limiting, and gives the BAOBAB audience no agency in deciding what they want to hear about. While they do have the opportunity to leave before the presentation begins, I believe it would be much more engaging, interesting, and rewarding for all parties involved if the seniors were able to have some form of input.

This could take many practical forms; students could submit a number of potential topics they are individually or as a group familiar with and have the seniors cast votes for what they’re most interested in, the seniors could submit a list, or a list of potential topics could be decided on jointly. Regardless of how this is done, the most important aspect of this additional step is to give the audience and make sure that the multicultural showcase both continues to explore new and exciting topics while also remaining relevant to the interests of the audience.

Speakers: Very much related to the topics of the presentations, I believe a greater diversity in speakers would serve the audience and students better by having a larger pool of more varied backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. As there were only three of us from rather similar backgrounds, we as student presenters had some difficulty coming up with topics we believed would grasp our audience’s attention.

Even if none of our sessions had been cancelled, this PRAXIS placement is rather on the lower side of the scale of hours of involvement; even if the showcase was extended from 30 to 60 minutes, participants still wouldn’t be spending much time at BAOBAB. This would be especially so if the number of times each person presented were to decrease if this plan was implemented. However, this could be addressed via formatting, which I address in the next section. Regardless, as the multicultural showcase seemed to do well with volunteers, I propose that it re-open itself to that possibility, while also continuing to be a PRAXIS option. This allows for a maximum number of students to be involved, therefore diversifying and widening the pool of experience presentations can be drawn from.

Format: One major complaint we presenters had was the lack of real tangible contact we had with the seniors. We had hoped to get to know the BAOBAB members individually and have more time to foster a dialogue rather than lecture; however, the format of the multicultural showcase did not lend itself very well to that. The seniors seemed reluctant to participate when the occasion did arise, possibly because of the large interpersonal gap between the lecturer and the audience.

By opening up the format of the showcase to allow more interpersonal interaction and dialogue, one not only fosters a more inclusive teaching / learning environment, but it also allows the BAOBAB seniors to contribute their knowledge and experiences outside of a collaborative format (should that not be adopted, or even if it should). It may also allow the BAOBAB members to contribute and collaborate with the speakers, lending experience that the students may not have themselves, and enriching everyone’s experiences.

Regarding the suggestion to widen the pool of students, I would also suggest a format change if this were to be done, to allow PRAXIS student participants to both spend more hours at BAOBAB and get to know the members better as well. PRAXIS members could do one of multiple things; attend additional BAOBAB classes as other PRAXIS members at the center have been doing, create a class / group / club at the BAOBAB pertaining to their interests or the objective of the class they are doing the PRAXIS program for, or perhaps do additional hours of the same or similar showcase format.

Material: One very noticeable thing was the audience response to more engaging non-lecture-based formats and materials involving more complex issues. In fact, after one presentation on segregation / desegregation and inter-group relations, one BAOBAB member thanked the presenter for talking about a topic with high academic value and not underestimating the audience’s intelligence or ability to synthesize the information. During another presentation on swing dance in which BAOBAB members were encouraged to participate, the members seemed more engaged as they and their peers became involved in the demonstration.

The fact that students / audiences are more invested in interactive lessons engaging them at their level of educational development is not news, but understandably more active participation may not be suited to the current system. However, that doesn’t mean that we as the “educators” shouldn’t strive to appeal to our listeners or foster active learning and involvement. By encouraging students to present on topics that are more relevant to the seniors’ interests (perhaps by having them involved in the topic selection process, as suggested above), as well as not oversimplifying the material, we can work towards improving our lessons and better serving the BAOBAB community. Many of those in attendance have multiple degrees, and decades of fascinating work experience, regardless of their educational background, and it is incredibly important to recognize the difference in functioning as an educator for children vs. doing so for adults.

**Conclusion**

I greatly enjoyed my time in my PRAXIS placement at the BAOBAB center, and hope that our presence there was as valuable to those around us as it was to my fellow students and me. That said, this Request for Proposal is submitted in the hopes of making changes to the program that would improve the experience in multiple ways. While I acknowledge that my perspective, and therefore suggestions, comes from a place of unfamiliarity with BAOBAB or the multicultural showcase program, I make these proposals because they are things that I believe would have greatly benefitted both the BAOBAB seniors as well as the students presenting. While I would by no means say that the multicultural showcase is failing, I do however believe that it has great potential to benefit the seniors and students even more than it does already. Above all, I wish to work towards a program that enriches the lives not just of the students using this experience for their coursework, but for the BAOBAB members as well, and perhaps even more so.