

Group Section

Honors Classes:

The Honors College courses we took were really what drove this project to where it is today. Each class pushed us in different ways, and led us to think about our project from different perspectives and allowed us to hold a mirror to ourselves and our progress often. Honors 2000 was the first course we took as a group, which consisted of about 6 members at the time. Four of our group members started this project in Honors 2000 and have seen it through the entire Honors college process to its fruition. Honors 2000 had us focused on finding a problem in the community we wanted to solve, which we referred to as our “wicked problem”. We spent every week learning how to refine the solution to our wicked problem, and we did a lot of team building along the way. In Honors 2000 we learned more about each other by building mind maps, having many group discussions, and comparing our work with the processes of other groups. We also heard from Honors students in the higher level courses that we would eventually take, and they showed us how to conduct our first interviews. At the end of our first course together, we presented a prototype of what our project would look like along with every other Honors 2000 group, and by a group voting process done by our fellow Honors 2000 colleagues, our project was chosen to move forward in Honors 3000.

The Honors 3000 course proved to be the most challenging semester for our group and our project. At the very beginning of the semester, our group size grew from six people to about twelve people. We had spent the entirety of Honors 2000 getting comfortable with communicating with one another, and now we had to learn how to make such a large group focused, responsible, and full of productive communication. We were also tasked with presenting a powerpoint slideshow every Tuesday for the entire semester. Each member of the group took turns updating the class of Honors 3000 through these presentations, as well as our Honors professors and even some students in the higher level Honors courses that we had met in the last semester. This presenting aspect of Honors 3000 ultimately proved to be beneficial. Not only were we forced out of comfort zones and into the realm of public speaking, but we were also generating new ideas every week in order to show progress in our presentations. The professors and older Honors students were charged with asking us relentlessly direct questions, and they were hard to hear some weeks. We were forced to combat questions on white savior complexes, lack of progress, moving in the wrong direction, sustainability, and more. These weekly presentations and interrogations slowly helped us to mold Building Buddies into what it is today. Another important aspect of Honors 3000 was learning how to conduct an interview. Each member of the group was required to conduct ten interviews, and there had to be variety among interviewees. We interviewed everyone we could think of, from college students to professors to nonprofit organizers. The most valuable aspect of the interview process was learning what it meant to be professional in any setting and that networking can make or break a project. Throughout the course of the semester, our interviews became more refined and began to offer real contributions to the project. By the end of Honors 3000, we were ready to launch Building Buddies.

In Honors 4500, our group started to become much more cohesive. There was still plenty of structure given by the Honors professors, but for the first time we were left to our own devices. In Honors 4500, our group shrunk from twelve to eight members, so it was much easier to divide and conquer every task. Instead of focusing inward, as we had in Honors 3000, we were now asked to look outward and make our project a reality. We shifted from interviews to communication with the directors at Building Hope, which was the non-profit organization that we partnered with in Honors 3000. The focus of this semester was learning how to fulfill our assigned roles in the best way possible and also how these roles were beneficial to the project as a whole. The structure given in Honors 4500 required us to meet every week, and to continue to show weekly progress. We had to have a detailed plan for the semester, and our plan kept us on track and motivated to see the project grow. In this semester, we also became the guides for the younger Honors students who had just begun taking Honors 2000, and were able to look back and reflect on the beginning stages of this process.

In Honors 4550, which took place last semester, we were finally seeing Building Buddies take shape. Thanks to these classes, we were constantly moving forward. By Spring 2020, we had a club with numerous members, a core group of volunteers, and were partnered with a wonderful organization. For most of the semester, we watched the students at Building Hope build connections with us and our volunteers, and it began to feel like all of the work we put in with every Honors course finally paid off. Unfortunately, just beyond the halfway point of Honors 4550, the coronavirus forced a sudden quarantine and we all headed home. Once again, being in an Honors course pushed us into forward motion despite feeling like we had taken two steps back. We began researching different ways we could continue to make an impact through our project, and were able to compose a contingency plan by the end of Honors 4550.

While we are no longer enrolled in any Honors courses, we are still continuing to follow down the path that we created in these courses. The contingency plan we created at the end of Honors 4550 was only a jumping off point, and during this semester we have held ourselves to the standard that we lived up to for the two years of Honors courses we endured.

Process:

The process of creating Building Buddies began with a wicked problem. In Honors 2000, we were instructed to identify a wicked problem and then come up with a “solution.” “Solution” is in quotes because a wicked problem in and of itself is a problem that is extremely difficult or impossible to solve. After pinpointing a problem, we began to brainstorm ideas on how to address this problem within the Greenville area and beyond. Our group began the process with the broad issue of poverty. Through brainstorming sessions and feedback from our professor and fellow students, we narrowed down our focus to the underprivileged youth of Greenville. Specifically, we decided to concentrate on the education aspect of this problem. With the process of narrowing down our ideas, we created a more attainable and concrete starting point for our project. Had we just continued trying to address the issue of poverty as a whole, we would not have been able to find a way to make an impact because we would have had no clear starting point.

Once we had agreed upon a specific problem to address, we began to generate ideas. Our first idea that we presented to the class was to create an after-school program for youth in Greenville where we would help them with homework, play with them, and give them a safe

place to go after school. However, after receiving feedback from our professor and classmates, we realized that this likely was not an achievable goal. It would have been difficult to find a place to have this program, find the funding we needed, find people to participate, and there were already many of these type programs in Greenville. We needed to narrow down further.

This is when we came up with the idea of developing a program with an organization that was already well-established in the Greenville area. We wanted to work with an organization that already had an after-school program in place, so we knew we needed to think of an idea that would bring something new to the table at that organization. We needed to think of a way in which we could make an impact different than what that organization was already doing. We wanted to expand on the great things that were already happening there. Through an extensive amount of research, which was the crux of Honors 2000 and 3000, in the form of online searches and interviews, we honed in on the idea of mentorship. Through literature and interviews with people such as social workers and teachers, we learned the value of having mentors and having a role model to look up to as a child. Thus, our idea of creating a mentorship program with an organization in Greenville was born. The vision of our organization was largely based on that of Big Brothers Big Sisters which is an organization that pairs a child up with an adult mentor in order to provide that child with a role model and someone to whom they can look up.

Our next step in the process was to identify an organization with which to work. We did research to find organizations in Greenville that worked with children and whose goals and values matched our own. This is when we found Building Hope, a non-profit organization that works with families in the community to help them build brighter futures. Through looking at their website, we found that they had an after-school program for both elementary school aged and middle school aged youth. Their goals through their after-school program were to provide academic assistance, character building, and spiritual guidance to their students. This looked like the perfect match for us. We quickly reached out to Building Hope and informed them of our interest in potentially partnering with them. They responded positively, and we set up a time to meet to discuss more in detail.

Our first meeting with the director of Building Hope and the head teacher there was a great experience. We presented to them our idea of creating mentor relationships between ECU students and their students who attended the after-school program. We explained that we wanted each student at Building Hope to be paired up with one ECU student who would meet with them every week at the after-school program, help them with their homework, and just be a friend and role model to them. We discussed sustainability and how to accomplish this. After the meeting, Building Hope listed several things that we discussed during the meeting and some key takeaways. They were as follows:

1. Not Recreating the Wheel-Contact Big Brothers Big Sisters to see if they have a Mentoring Rules, Policies, and Procedures Training Manual
2. Commitment timeline for the Mentors (Semester Vs Year-Long, Hours per week)
3. Role of a Mentor & the Role of the Mentee
4. Culturally Competent & Culturally Aware Mentoring
5. Do's & Don'ts of A Mentee & Mentor Relationship
6. Establishment of ECU Mentoring Club rather than a Semester long Project

7. Project Timeline
8. Sustainability Plan
9. *Building Hopes' Executive Director willing to coach the group through this process
10. Contract Agreement with Club & Building Hope
11. 12-hour Commitment before pairing with a Student/6-month consistent volunteering before spending time outside of BH
12. Pairing Survey for Mentor and Mentee
13. Purpose, Mission, Vision, Values of the ECU Honors College Mentoring Club (Project)

These thirteen items are ultimately what guided us through the rest of the creation process of our club and what still guide us as an organization today. They are the most important things to focus on when creating an organization or program.

In Honors 3000, we presented our progress to the rest of the Honors college freshmen each week. We did interviews, researched, and refined our ideas based on the “relentlessly direct” feedback we received from the Honors professors. We were faced with tough questions and critiques which helped us make improvements to our club. One of the biggest issues that we were asked about in Honors 3000 was sustainability. We needed to make sure we were creating something that would not just be a one time thing because this would be defeating the entire purpose of our organization. After the sustainability of our organization was questioned, we implemented things such as officer positions and timeline requirements for club members.

In Honors 4500, we began our club member recruitment process. We reached out to Living Learning Communities such as education and the Honors College, put up fliers, and advertised through avenues like social media. We scheduled interest meetings and general meetings with ECU students to inform them of the goals of Building Buddies and the expectations of being a member. We then began to go into Building Hope on Fridays to lead what are called Fun Fridays. We led the Building Hope students in fun games and activities and club members were able to be introduced to the students. We also started volunteering once a week aside from Fridays. Club members would go into Building Hope to the after-school program once a week and were instructed to try to work with a specific student or a specific age group every time they came in order to begin to foster mentorship relationships. This continued through the first semester of last year and the beginning of the second semester before COVID-19 hit. Through both semesters of last year we continued to learn and grow and make improvements to Building Buddies. We thought of better ways to recruit members and continued to think of ways in which we could be effective mentors.

This year, we have implemented a pen pal program between our club members and the students at Building Hope due to the ongoing pandemic. However, before beginning this program, we made efforts again to recruit new and dedicated members. We worked hard to advertise through social media and reach out to those we thought would be interested. We gained some new members and now each student at Building Hope has a pen pal who is a member of Building Buddies. Though a pen pal program was not exactly what we had hoped to have to do this semester, through creating this program through the Honors College, we have learned to pivot and adapt and to not stop the process when faced with challenges.

Challenges:

While working through the process of creating a club on campus, we were faced with many challenges. These challenges included difficulties with communication amongst ourselves and Building Hope as well as recruiting members and membership involvement. Throughout the honors classes we gained and lost multiple members. This was a challenge because we had to figure out how to work together and learn about each other while working towards our end goal. At times it became difficult to incorporate everyone's ideas.

Throughout working with Building Hope, especially in the beginning, we struggled with a lack of communication between ourselves and our contacts at Building Hope. This lack of communication made planning events and keeping our members updated difficult. Eventually we were able to figure out ways of communicating that worked best for both parties and figuring out a schedule with Building Hope created less of a need for communication. This past semester has proven difficult due to the pandemic and we found ourselves struggling to come up with ways of being involved with Building Hope without being able to physically volunteer. Through our communication with Building Hope and ourselves, we came up with a school supply drive that we held at the beginning of the fall semester. With the drive we applied to donate cleaning supplies, school supplies, and snacks that Building Hope greatly appreciated. We were able to show Building Hope and their students that although we may not be able to be there physically, we still supported them and were thinking about them during this time. We were also able to create a pen pal program with Building Hope's elementary students. This has created new challenges for our club, but we have been able to fix those issues rather quickly due to what we've learned from past challenges.

Another challenge we have faced, and are still working through, is recruiting dedicated members. We have been able to recruit quite a few members through our relationships with the Education LLC and the Honors College, however, we are still working towards finding more male members. This is a want of not only ourselves but also Building Hope. Building Hope has a few 5th grade boys and they have shared their want in us finding male figures that their students can relate too. This has proved to be a challenge for us, but we are working towards finding male ECU students with an interest in being members of our club. We hope with the spring semester possibly going back face-to-face that we will be able to recruit on campus and reach out to other organizations, LLC's, and programs with a higher male involvement.

Learning:

Our group learned from the very beginning of this class that we have to find ways to overcome challenges, otherwise known as pivoting. This was especially essential when COVID-19 happened because as a group, we had to find a new way we could be active with Building Hope and continue our organization Building Buddies.

The biggest takeaway as a group was that no matter how many turns or changes that had to be made to our project and club, if we continue putting our all into it, a solution can be found. This can be used in every group member's daily lives.

Another big thing we learned was how mentoring can not only impact us but also the children. The kids were able to not feel alone in the day to day challenges. The mentors were able to show that we care for kids and as mentees we could see how we positively impacted the

kids' lives. The outcome we got from mentoring these children is being able to feel proud in the changes we are doing in the Greenville community.

Having this experience, we learned that if you put your mind to it, you are able to create changes, even if it is just one community. In this case, these changes helped kids feel like they have a support system that they can rely on.

Data:

When faced with questions from the Honors 4500 instructors, our group quickly realized there was research to be done on the foundation of our project: mentorship. In order to effectively carry out our mission, we needed to understand what mentorship looked like, what it means to be a good mentor, and how to avoid misunderstandings within the demographic we were planning on working with.

According to author Yetunde Oshinkale in an article written for World Education Services, "The mentor benefits because they are able to lead the future generation in an area they care about and ensure that best practices are passed along; meanwhile, the mentee benefits because they have proven that they are ready to take the next step in their career and can receive the extra help needed to make that advancement." This statement truly embodied what our group was aiming to accomplish. While our intentions were pure, there were obstacles in our way brought to our attention by the Honors 4500 instructors. Our greatest obstacle was tackling the potential of our project exemplifying the "white savior complex." This idea can be described as a majority cultural group providing materialistic or emotional support to a minority group as a way to boost their own ego and promote their good deeds rather than providing support out of genuine charity. To avoid this issue, Building Hope provided cultural training for all volunteers. This program was already a requirement for volunteers, which was beneficial for our group in an effort to avoid the white savior complex. The cultural training was emailed to each volunteer after the completion of a volunteer application (found on the Building Hope website) and the completion and passing of a background check.

Impact:

When you Google the definition for impact one of the definitions says to "have a strong effect on someone or something" and if you keep scrolling you see other sources mention "the action of one object coming forcibly into contact with another' and having 'a marked effect or influence'." These definitions surrounding the word "impact" means our group had a great responsibility that could leave either negative or positive repercussions with our community partner Building Hope, children in the Greenville community, college students at ECU, and students and faculty in the Honors College. Our group can be proud of what we have done and the impact we have made relating to all of these areas. We believe our main areas of impact include Building Hope and the students there, as well as the college mentors that volunteer their time each week.

In 2018 when this project became a thought, our group only dreamed about having a club that involved both college students and children in the community being involved in a mutually beneficial relationship built around mentorship. Now, we can proudly say that is what our club has achieved. Currently we have almost 50 members on our Building Buddies engage page and almost 40 members in our GroupMe message. Out of these members, we have over

20 active members that volunteer each week by mentoring a child at Building Hope either face to face with homework, play, and other activities or through a pen pal mentorship program. This means that 21 students at Building Hope are currently having weekly conversations with college students who can provide an outside social outlet whether that child needs a friend, leader, mentor, or simply someone to listen to them. Kids have a lot to say and we want to hear them out. We have heard many of our ECU mentors say how excited they get to go every week to Building Hope and even in the face of COVID, our mentors still have intentional passion and enthusiasm for their mentees.

We have built a lasting relationship with the administration and staff at Building Hope that has fostered an environment where we help each other reach our goals and missions. This is something that makes our project sustainable and therefore “sticky.”

Pivots:

Throughout this process we had multiple failures and successes as a group. I believe that the successes helped to give our group confidence and that the failures were something that we could learn from and turn into successes. Due to the failures, there were multiple pivots that were taken while creating this organization on campus. Our first major pivot that we struggled with was changing our original idea of an afterschool program, into a mentorship program. This was done because it created an organization that was more sustainable. This sustainability is provided through partnering with an existing organization that allowed for us to focus on other aspects of the club. We were able to focus on recruitment and volunteering, instead of having to focus on creating an after school program from the ground up. After deciding to pursue the mentoring ship program, we chose to model this after some successful and existing mentorship programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Another pivot that we were able to decide on as a group was that instead of everyone collaborating on everything together, we decided to assign roles within the club. This way we could ensure that each part of the club was working and that each officer was contributing equally. This helped to resolve some issues of people not being on the same page when trying to complete something. This is because it made everyone accountable for contributing to the club by doing their part, and ensured that no one was cruising along without putting forth the same effort. With assigning roles within the club we were able to accomplish more as a team and come to the weekly meetings knowing that each member had completed their tasks for the week.

The next pivot that we had to face was how we were going to keep group members engaged while still paired with kids so that no one was left without a mentor. This was combated with first attending building hope as a group and getting to know the kids along with their personalities so that the matches between the mentor and the mentee were natural. This was not the original plan which was to pair up mentors with students from the start. This pivot ensured that the relationship between the pairs would be one that worked. This allowed us to pair our mentors with an age group the following semester that they had the most natural connection with. This pivot was beneficial because none of the kids felt left out because mentors were assigned to an age group of a few kids. This still allowed for close relationships between the children and the mentors because they were still able to focus on building meaningful relationships with a few children at Building hope.

Our most recent pivot as a group was navigating how to keep our club and members active within the organization during COVID-19. This was really challenging and took a lot of thought since the main focus was mentoring and we were no longer allowed to go and see the children. The solution that we came up with to stay involved was pairing the mentors and children up and creating a pen pal program. This allowed us to stay involved and continue to grow meaningful relationships with the children while we were not able to physically be present at Building Hope. We are currently continuing to meet virtually to ensure that we are bettering and constantly growing our club. The pen pal program is going well so far and we are thinking of ways to ensure the club's success for when we are able to return to mentoring in person.

References

Oshinkale, Y. (2020, January 10). Definition of Mentorship: What Is a Mentor and Do You Need One? Retrieved November 13, 2020, from <https://www.wes.org/advisor-blog/definition-of-mentorship/>

Individual Reflection

In the beginning, I believed the purpose of this project to be developing teamwork skills, project development, building community relationships, and problem solving. While all of these and more came with the project, the greatest thing I took from my Signature Honors Project experience was failure, dealing with team conflicts, and having to end a project without finishing it.

Conflict is something I struggle with personally, but, with a graduation requirement on the line, it needed to be handled. I learned how to address conflict as a group and use other resources, such as instructors and mentors, as liaisons to resolve said conflict. Handling conflict in the beginning stages of our project helped the end stages run smoothly. As a team, we were able to agree on how to handle the club we created, fulfill officer positions, and continue with the integrity of our project.

Failure was seen at every pivot, progression, and change. I knew that not everything would work out perfectly, but experiencing failure helped us grow as a team and as individuals. Being told “no” or “that won’t work” caused me to think critically and creatively. The greatest failure, in my opinion, experienced in our project was Covid-19. Our club was based solely on establishing in person relationships with the children at Building Hope; therefore, when social distance and lockdowns began, we were left at a stand still. I believe we did our best to create virtual and socially distanced events that continued to benefit Building Hope, but fostering excitement among club members was difficult. There was also a sustainability issue: every officer member would be graduating in the next semester. Due to Covid restrictions occurring the majority of the existence of the club, it was difficult to make relationships with our members and get them excited to continue the club as officers and leaders. For this reason, we collectively decided to end the club.

Personally, I find success in finishing what I start. When the club ended, I felt unsuccessful. I had to redefine my definition of success. Reflecting on my time as a student at ECU from being a freshman in Honors 2000 to writing my final reflection for my Signature Honors Project, I found we really were successful as a team and myself as an individual. The purpose of this entire experience was to have the space and environment to “safely” fail without receiving a bad grade or other consequences. The purpose was to discover new things about myself. I learned that I can be confrontational when given support from teammates and faculty, that dead ends are not what they look like, and being told “no” leads to new findings and new solutions. Overall, I’m grateful for the project. It was not the easiest or the most enjoyable, but I helped me grow and learn. Thank you Honors College!