

Strategic Plan for MESA Creators in Summer Programs

Purpose – The purpose of this plan is to guide MESA Creators in making the most of an internship or research experience. Follow this plan to increase your success – *that’s what MESA Creators do!* Enjoy the experience.

Goal? Before using this Strategic Plan, you must first identify your reason for participating in the internship or research program. What do you hope to gain, i.e. knowledge, skills, experience or something else? Once you know your goal(s) for your summer program, this Strategic Plan is the key for achieving your goal(s).

Culture? MESA Creators know that “culture” is everywhere, especially in higher education and organizations! Culture shapes everything and everyone in an organization. Beyond a *surface culture* (i.e. things that are visible), what should you know about the invisible, yet very important *deep culture* (i.e. norms, rules, attitudes, expectations, etc.) in the organization that offers your summer program? Understanding the organizational culture is critical for increasing your success.

1. Expectations
2. Evaluation
3. Resources
4. Mentors
5. Networking
6. Leadership
7. Professional Development
8. Presentation of Achievements
9. Letter of Recommendation
10. Future Opportunities

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- Expectations** – What is expected of you in the summer program? What knowledge and skills are you expected to have BEFORE beginning the program? What are you expected to achieve in the program? How and when are you expected to achieve it? Your success in the program depends on being very clear on expectations from Day 1.
- Evaluation** – How will you be evaluated during and especially at the end of the program? Who will be evaluating you? If there is an end-of-program evaluation, what does it consist of, i.e. is there an evaluation form, what evaluation process will be followed, etc.? If the evaluation process, including forms and materials, is documented, then request copies of these materials on Day 1. Knowing how you will be evaluated will help you to be prepared and to stay focused on areas for improvement. **KEY STRATEGY** ➔ Ask your supervisor for an informal evaluation halfway through the summer program to assess your progress through the 1st half of the program and identify any recommendations for the 2nd half. This evaluation will help you to avoid any surprises at the end of the program.

- ❑ **Resources** – What resources are available to help you in the summer program? How, when and where are they available? Is there a program orientation? Being familiar with available resources is key to your success in the program.
- ❑ **Mentors** – Who are your mentors? Who can you count on for guidance and support for overcoming challenges? Do you have a mentor “formally” assigned to you or do you rely on “informal” mentors, who are not necessarily assigned to you but that you trust? Mentors can also help you to network with others and to identify future opportunities.
KEY STRATEGY ➔ Your mentors are key for helping you to recognize and understand the differences between the organization’s surface culture and deep culture. This cultural knowledge is critical for you to successfully interact with others in the organization.
- ❑ **Networking** – *Why networking?* Because your network of connections is your most important resource! Begin by becoming familiar with the functional structure, i.e. *big picture*, for your organization. How is it organized, i.e. by divisions, departments, projects, etc.? What roles exist in each area? What are the job titles? Who reports to whom? As you begin to connect and build relationships with others, you will have a better understanding of the role that they play in the organization, and you will have a “face” to associate with that role.
- ❑ **Leadership** – *Beyond simply developing scholars, your MESA Program develops leaders!* What opportunities exist for you to develop your leadership skills during the summer program? However, leadership requires initiative! It is very important for you to be proactive in seeking and recognizing opportunities for taking a leadership role, e.g. on a team, in giving a presentation or any activity where leadership is needed.
- ❑ **Professional Development** – What opportunities and/or resources are available to increase your professional development? Beyond your assignment, mentors and networking, what materials, workshops, training, etc. can you benefit from to increase your skills and knowledge?
- ❑ **Presentation of Achievements** – Effective communication is a fundamental quality of leaders. Make it your priority to take every opportunity in the summer program, e.g. during meetings, end-of-summer symposium, etc., to clearly and concisely communicate what you have achieved and learned. It is also very important to solicit feedback from others to improve your communication skills.
- ❑ **Letter of Recommendation** – *Yes!* This is very simple. At the conclusion of the summer program, you must obtain a generic letter of recommendation (addressed “to whom it may concern”) from your supervisor. Ideally, the letter will capture your personal strengths, demonstrated skills and achievements in the program. Keep the letter in your personal file for future use in applying for scholarships, internships and other opportunities.
- ❑ **Future Opportunities** – *What’s next?* The summer program must be your stepping-stone to future opportunities. During the program, it is very important that you remain alert to possible “next level” opportunities and inquire about them, i.e. what does it require, how & when do you apply, what makes a successful applicant, etc.? **KEY STRATEGY** ➔ Speak with your mentor(s) and supervisor for suggestions and guidance about possible opportunities.

Developing STEM scholars and leaders ... MESA works!