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2012 Envisioning Youth Empowerment Retreat Program Evaluation Report
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Abstract

The Governor Morehead School Alumni Association is a nonprofit organization that aims to improve the educational opportunities afforded to visually impaired children and adults throughout the State of North Carolina and support the student body at The Governor Morehead School for the Blind. The Envisioning Youth Empowerment (EYE) Retreat is an initiative of the Alumni Association to promote higher education opportunities for youth with visual impairments. The EYE Retreat is in its 4th year of serving youth with visual impairments and continues to reevaluate its programming each year to ensure participants receive the highest quality experience. Programming is based upon the concepts of popular education and real world experiences, where peers with visual impairments already attending college share their knowledge with participants and engage in all scheduled activities to serve as role models as participants experience simulated college activities. The 2012 EYE Retreat was held Sunday, July 29th to Saturday, August 4th, 2012. Participants experience college life during a weeklong Retreat through visits to North Carolina State University, interactions with current college students, and presentations on topics related to college transition. Twenty eight participants from California, Connecticut, Georgia, and North Carolina attended with a variety of visual impairments ranging from blindness to low vision. The results of the 2012 EYE Retreat evaluations indicate that the largest gain was in the area of self-advocacy and accommodations. Adjustments to programming in the areas of public transit, Retreat duration, campus navigation, and classroom discussions were noted.

Introduction

The Envisioning Youth Empowerment Retreat (EYE Retreat) began informally in the summer of 2009 as a means to train youth with disabilities from the State of North Carolina on topics related to disability history and advocacy. The purpose of this informal gathering was to help develop a curriculum to aid in the implementation of the North Carolina Disability History and Awareness Act, signed into law by Governor Easley in 2007. Demand for a summer youth program to allow for prolonged teaching of advocacy skills, rather than just a brief class period presentation, increased and by the summer of 2010 the EYE Retreat was formally established.

The EYE Retreat Leadership Team identified students with visual impairments as the focus group based upon a review of research materials that indicated disproportionate numbers in both

employment and educational attainment when compared to both other disability categories and nondisabled peers. The program developed was based on research that provides guidance as to what makes for a successful transition for students from high school to post secondary settings.

The EYE Retreat curriculum is based on three main principles: 1) mentoring, 2) real world experiences, and 3) developing advocacy skills. These three areas all correspond to areas of research that help students with visual impairments be successful at institutions of higher learning. Our mentoring component helps with networking and social skills, both of which are predictors for success. Visits to Governor Morehead School, NC State University and local attractions helps to build upon orientation and mobility skills, knowledge of assistive devices, and knowledge of available resources. Introduction to part of a self-advocacy curriculum and interactions with peers and professors forces participants to develop and refine their advocacy and self-determination skills.

Unfortunately, research specific to students with visual impairments is limited. Most research addresses topics generalized to students with all types of disabilities (McDroom). Nonetheless, some useful information is available and serves as the basis for the program developed by the EYE Retreat leadership. A summary of the data reviewed is offered below.

1. About 6% of fulltime freshmen self-report a disability in higher education. (Belch, 2004)
2. 32% of students with disabilities dropout of college. (McDroom)
3. In 1994, 16% of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education completed a bachelor's as compared to only 12% in 2000. (Belch, 2004)

Research supports use of the following activities to make transition more effective for students with disabilities. (Belch, 2004; McDroom)

1. Mentoring
2. Self-determination training
3. Sense of belonging (physical and emotional accessibility)
4. Sense of purpose
5. Campus involvement
6. Work experiences throughout high school and college
7. Higher education
8. Use of assistive technology and/or devices
9. Orientation and mobility training
10. Social skills

A qualitative study of upperclassmen students with visual impairments sought to identify the most important activities students themselves could engage in to increase their likelihood of successful completion of college. (McDroom)

1. Preregister for classes 93.0%
2. Communicate with teachers 87.2%
3. Decide on college to attend 85.3%
4. Apply for financial aid 84.7%

5. Locate transportation 82.3%
6. Learn how to manage money 81.0%
7. Receive campus O&M instruction 80.8%
8. Make housing arrangements 78.3%
9. Order textbooks early 77.3%
10. Visit college during orientation 76.0%
11. Work with vocational rehabilitation services 75.3%
12. Communicate with disability services office 75.2%
13. Find and schedule readers 70.1%
14. Decide on college major 57.4%
15. Meet or talk with roommate 53.8%
16. Attend college preparatory program 42.3%

Literature Review

A review of research and literature related to college transition for students with visual impairments was difficult. Searches of popular databases yielded primarily results for students with disabilities, rather than students with visual impairments. McDroom noted in his article that research on transition for students with visual impairments was lacking. Nonetheless, articles related to transition, higher education retention, and employment outcomes were located and used as the foundation for the EYE Retreat. The articles are presented here in the order in which a typical student with a visual impairment would encounter such situations as they transition from high school to college and college to the workforce.

First, McDroom notes in his study of 102 college students with visual impairments that about 32% of students with disabilities dropout of college. This typically occurs during the freshmen and sophomore years. McDroom sought to identify what resources current students with visual impairments utilize to be most successful in college. He began by mailing letters to disability services offices at sixty six colleges and universities around the country seeking participants for telephone interviews. These offices made the letters available to their students. A total of 102 students from all geographic regions of the United States responded and are represented in the sample. All of the respondents held junior or senior classifications. The sample included an almost equal number of males and females. A majority of the respondents had been born with their visual impairment, while about a quarter developed their visual impairment during high school. 42% of the respondents felt it was important to participate in a college preparatory program and 76% stated visiting prospective campuses was important. 75% stressed the importance of working with both disability services and vocational rehabilitation agencies. 77% of the respondents indicated that ordering books early was important and 93% emphasized communicating with professors. 82% thought identifying transportation options was important too.

Next, Belch examined two college transition programs to identify what role those programs play in graduation rates for students with disabilities. He reports that in 1994 16% of students with disabilities graduated with an undergraduate degree, but that percentage later decreased to 12% in the year 2000. His examination revealed that self-advocacy training, campus involvement, mentoring, and practical application of skills best increased the chances for a successful college

experience for students with disabilities. At the University of Washington, high school students attend a summer long program in which peers serve as mentors and all students attend classes on self-advocacy and independent science exploration. About 80% of the students who attend this program go on to graduate from college. At the University of Georgia, an annual orientation for freshmen with disabilities focuses on study skills, assistive technology, career planning, and leadership development. 46% of the freshmen who attend this specialized orientation graduate from the University of Georgia within four years, whereas about 51% of students with disabilities nationally typically graduate within six years.

Overall, the findings of these studies serve as the foundation for the core programming of the EYE Retreat. An important distinction to note here is that these studies incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data so that we can be absolutely sure that application of the research is effective.

Method

Initial planning for the 2012 EYE Retreat began in January 2012 with the development of a blog, participant applications, and publicity materials. The EYE Retreat sought participants through mailings, internet sites and e-mail, and advocacy organizations of the blind. Mailings through the United States Postal Service were directed to all high schools in the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Announcements were posted on the EYE Retreat blog, various Facebook pages, and websites of several blind advocacy organizations. Applications from individuals residing in California, Connecticut, Georgia, and North Carolina were received. Additionally, the EYE Retreat formally partnered with the North Carolina Rehabilitation Center for the Blind's college transition program so that their students could participate in selected EYE Retreat activities.

The EYE Retreat accepted a total of twenty eight participants, including five group leaders and seven students from the North Carolina Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. Group leaders differed from participants only in that they carried the additional responsibility of supervising and escorting groups of participants during the day. Otherwise, group leaders and participants equally engaged in all scheduled activities. Since the seven Rehabilitation Center students did not participate in all EYE Retreat activities, they are not included in demographic or evaluation data. Of the twenty one EYE Retreat participants, eight were Braille readers and thirteen were print readers. Seven were current high school students and thirteen were current college students. The thirteen participants ranged in age from 14 to 22 years old. The five group leaders ranged in age from 23 to 47. Each represented various experiences with higher education, employment, and advocacy. One group leader was a recent college graduate and one was a nontraditional student. The remaining three were current community college students. Participants were asked to self-report their level of visual ability. No documentation was required and no verification of information provided was conducted. Six participants reported being blind, six reported being legally blind, and nine indicated they were visually impaired.

The weeklong Retreat aimed to condense six years of schooling into one week. The week began with group leader and volunteer orientation. At this orientation, policies and procedures were reviewed and the schedule for the week explained in detail. Expectations for behavior,

responsibilities, and roles were described as well. Group leaders were provided with general guidance on how to engage their participants in icebreakers and discussions, but specific lesson planning was at the discretion of each leader. The afternoon was dedicated to moving into dorm rooms, getting to know each other, and beginning discussions of self-advocacy.

Day two began with participants boarding Capital Area Transit buses and learning to swipe a bus pass in order to travel to the campus of North Carolina State University. Participants observed a mock disability services intake meeting, heard presentations on accommodations provided by the university, and sampled some assistive technology available to students. After that, they ate lunch at one of the campus dining facilities and later boarded a Wolfline campus shuttle to travel to the location of their mock class. The mock class was divided into three sessions, with two sessions occurring on one day because of scheduling conflicts and time constraints. The first mock class session covered the course syllabus and other general course expectations, just as any first class meeting would cover. The second session simulated the first content lecture that would typically be given in the course. The course lasted about one hour and forty five minutes. Participants returned to Governor Morehead School by way of Capital Area Transit bus. The evening time was structured with various activities from which participants could select. Participants could choose from going off campus, going to the computer lab to work on their homework, or going to the campus gym. It was emphasized that participants experience the freedoms associated with college life and make decisions about their priorities.

Day three consisted of morning presentations from North Carolina State University's Union Activities Board and Wake Technical Community College. The NCSU Union Activities Board discussed campus organizations available to students, developing leadership skills through campus activities, and social events typically held each year. Wake Technical Community College discussed issues specific to the community college setting and how it differed from a university. In the afternoon, participants returned to NCSU to hear a presentation from the Career Services office on how to begin preparing for post graduation employment. Following that, participants engaged in the third and final session of their mock class.

Day four was designed to give participants a glimpse of the Capitol City of Raleigh and an urban environment. The morning started with presentations from the North Carolina Library for the Blind, which focused on library services available to its patrons and Division of Services for the Blind, which emphasized resources available to students before, during, and after college. Next, participants toured the North Carolina State Legislature, where they were able to discuss current legislative issues facing North Carolinians. After that, participants toured the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, where they were able to experience both tactile and audible exhibits. Finally, during the evening hours participants were given the option to attend a dance on the campus of Governor Morehead School sponsored by the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind or venture off campus with group leaders to continue experiencing what Raleigh has to offer.

Day five focused on putting everything together that had been learned throughout the week to obtain their ultimate goal, which for almost everyone was obtaining gainful employment after college. Participants heard from an employer in the community on topics ranging from interview

skills to accommodations at the workplace. The morning ended with exchanges of contact information, completion of program evaluations, and packing of belongings in the dorms.

The EYE Retreat continuously strives to improve its programming and policies to meet the demands of 21st century learners. To this end, two assessments were administered to evaluate the structure of the EYE Retreat and the content that is presented. Each participant was randomly assigned a number to track their pre and post assessment responses. First, each participant was provided a pre-test that included fourteen statements related to essential components of the program curriculum. Each participant was asked to rate their ability to perform each stated task by using a sliding scale of one to ten, with one indicating they needed another person to perform the task for them and ten meaning they could independently perform the task. A post-test with identical statements was administered at the conclusion of the week so that responses could be graphed and evaluated for trends. Secondly, a program evaluation was administered at the conclusion of the week that consisted of written responses to statements about their experiences at the EYE Retreat as they related to facilities, programming, policies, and satisfaction.

Results

Twenty one pre assessments, post assessments, and program evaluations were distributed. Fifteen were returned for a response rate of 71%. The results are presented in table one. The primary purpose of the data collection was to identify patterns and growth collectively and individually. Therefore, averages of data sets associated with each participant's responses as well as data sets associated with each category were calculated. The averages of the pre and post assessments were then compared in order to identify growth, regression, and patterns. Patterns were further evaluated to determine areas of program strengths and areas for improvement.

Raw Data of Participant Responses by Category

Table one

Category	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Pre	9	9	8	8	9	8	10	9	10	9	8	9	7	9
1 Post	9	9	9	10	9	9	9	9	10	10	9	9	9	9
2 Pre	6	8	7	9	9	10	10	8	10	10	10	9	9	10
2 Post	9	10	8	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8
3 Pre	7	9	8	8	9	10	10	8	10	7	6	9	5	8
3 Post	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8	5	8
5 Pore	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
5 Post	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9
6 Pre	1	6	8	8	9	8	9	9	7	8	10	1	9	8
6 Post	8	9	9	9	9	10	8	8	5	8	10	8	9	9
7 Pre	9	10	9	10	10	10	9	8	8	9	7	7	9	7
7 Post	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	1	10	7	7	9	8
8 Pre	8	10	1	7	9	6	7	7	4	10	10	10	9	10

8 Post	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8	9	10	10	10	7	9
9 Pre	8	10	10	9	8	8	10	10	10	8	7	9	9	8
9 Post	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
10 Pre	8	5	10	8	10	10	7	8	10	8	10	7	5	7
10 Post	9	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	9	9	10	10	10	10
11 Pre	8	10	9	9	8	10	10	10	10	10	6	8	6	8
11 Post	10	9	10	10	10	9	10	9	9	10	8	8	7	9
12 Pre	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
12 Post	9	7	10	10	10	10	8	10	10	10	10	9	8	10
13 Pre	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
13 Post	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8	10	10	10	10
14 Pre	9	10	8	9	8	10	10	7	2	7	1	9	10	6
14 Post	10	10	10	10	8	5	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
15 Pre	10	5	10	9	8	8	10	9	8	10	5	9	8	8
15 Post	9	9	10	9	10	10	8	8	10	10	5	8	8	1
16 Pre	8	10	10	8	10	10	7	8	10	10	5	10	1	1
16 Post	10	10	9	9	8	10	9	9	6	9	1	10	10	9

Category numbers correspond to the following topics covered during the EYE Retreat.

- 1: Self-advocacy
- 2: Explaining my disability
- 3: Identifying accommodations
- 4: Explaining accommodations
- 5: Identifying assistive technology
- 6: Using assistive technology
- 7: Identifying differences between high school and college
- 8: Developing a career plan
- 9: Participating in classroom discussion
- 10: Advocating for classroom accommodations
- 11: Riding public transportation
- 12: Identifying my own strengths
- 13: Navigating a college campus
- 14: Locating resources on a college campus

A review of the raw data indicates that categories three (identifying accommodations) and four (explaining accommodations) remained consistent or increased from the pre to post assessment. The remaining categories all saw at least one decline from the pre to post assessment. More specifically, categories seven (identifying differences between high school and college) and nine (participating in classroom discussion) had the sharpest decline with four participants each lowering their response. Category fourteen (locating resources on campus) saw a decrease by three participants. Two participants each indicated lower responses on categories one, eight, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen from the pre to post assessment. The greatest decrease from pre to post assessment was indicated under categories nine and fourteen with a decline of seven points

each. The greatest gain from pre to post assessment was found under categories three, eleven, and thirteen with an increase of nine points each.

Average Participant Response and Growth by Category

Table two

Category	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Pre	8.1	8.4	8.5	8.8	9.1	9.2	9.3	8.7	8.6	9.1	7.7	8.5	7.8	8.0
Post	9.5	9.5	9.6	9.6	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.3	8.6	9.6	8.6	9.1	8.8	8.6
Growth	+1.4	+1.1	+1.1	+0.8	+0.4	+0.3	+0.2	+0.6	0.0	+0.5	+0.9	+0.6	+1.0	+0.6

As a whole, with the exception of one category, all categories covered during the EYE Retreat saw an increase in the response from the pre to post assessment. Categories one (self-advocacy), two (explaining my disability), three (identifying accommodations), and thirteen (navigating a campus) saw the largest increase by one point or more from pre to post assessment. Responses for category nine remained the same from pre to post assessment (participating in classroom discussion). Category seven (identifying difference between high school and college) saw the least increase of all the categories. Overall, no responses decreased from pre to post assessment in any given category.

Overall Average Response and Individual Growth by Participant

Table three

Participant	Average Response	Growth
1 Pre	8.1	+0.5
1 Post	8.6	
2 Pre	8.3	+0.6
2 Post	8.9	
3 Pre	7.6	+1.1
3 Post	8.7	
5 Pre	9.3	+0.6
5 Post	9.3	
6 Pre	6.7	+1.2
6 Post	7.9	
7 Pre	8.1	0.0

7 Post	8.1	
8 Pre	7.2	+1.7
8 Post	8.9	
9 Pre	8.3	+1.0
9 Post	9.3	
10 Pre	7.5	+1.6
10 Post	9.1	
11 Pre	8.1	+0.4
11 Post	8.5	
12 Pre	9.3	- 0.6
12 Post	8.7	
13 Pre	9.3	- 0.1
13 Post	9.2	
14 Pre	7.1	+1.8
14 Post	8.9	
15 Pre	7.8	- 0.2
15 Post	7.6	
16 Pre	7.2	+0.7
16 Post	7.9	

Unlike the group as a whole, responses from the pre to post assessment indicated some regression amongst the participants. Three participants did not remain the same or show growth based upon their pre and post assessment responses. One participant had no change from the pre to post assessment. The remaining ten participants showed some level of gain ranging from 0.1 to 1.8 points.

Most importantly, participants were provided an opportunity to reflect upon and express their ideas. Participants were given the opportunity to provide written feedback, suggestions, and comments via open ended statements. The statements are provided below along with summaries

of the written comments received. Comments with similar ideas were grouped together. The purpose of this section was to gauge the effectiveness of the program and facilities from an individual perspective to help guide future planning.

1. The one thing I enjoyed about the EYE Retreat was...

Four people stated meeting new people.

Three indicated the mock class.

Three stated meeting new people and sharing experiences.

Two indicated experiencing college life.

One indicated the use of technology.

2. One thing I would change is...

Three people indicated more interactive activities.

Two people indicated the temperature of the cottages.

One person stated shortening transportation time.

One person asked that the legislative trip be eliminated.

One person asked that the EYE Retreat be longer than one week.

One person indicated more time with technology and campus orientation is needed.

One person stated group leaders need training on sensitivity.

One person indicated there should be more off campus time

One person asked for more use of public transit.

3. One thing I did not like was....

Four indicated they didn't dislike anything.

Two said they disliked all the lectures.

Two indicated they disliked the temperature in the cottages.

Two stated they disliked the tour of the legislature.

One person stated too many people fell behind during group travel.

One person indicated there were too many interruptions during presentations.

One person asked that more Braille materials be provided.

4. The most important I learned was

Four people said being a better advocate.

Two people said leadership techniques.

Two said using assistive technology.

Two indicated learning about resources available.

Two stated learning about college expectations.

One said patience and understanding.

One indicated orientation and mobility techniques.

One person stated communicating and group work.

5. The activity that I learned the least from was

Three said there was no activity they did not learn from.

Three stated the legislative trip.

One said the mock class.

One person indicated the homework assignment.

One person mentioned the Library for the Blind presentation.
One person noted the goal ball activity.

6. The cottage environment helped me to practice independent living by
Four indicated getting along with roommates.
Two said learning to share the bathroom.
One said advocating for a cleaner bathroom.

7. The cottage was not realistic experience because
Three noted that the Program Coordinator had a curfew for participants.
Two stated not being able to adjust the temperature.
One indicated the length of the program did not simulate a college semester because it was too short.
One said the cottages were too quiet.
One person noted the room visitation policy.
One person stated the cottages were on The Governor Morehead School campus.

Next, participants were asked to indicate how effective they felt each major activity of the EYE Retreat was as it relates to assisting them in transitioning to higher education. According to the participants, the most helpful activity during the 2012 EYE Retreat was the mentoring relationship between group leaders and participants. Also, a majority of participants indicated riding public transit and visiting NC State University were very helpful. Further, about 73% of the participants thought that the mock course would help prepare them to transition to higher education. As noted earlier, the least beneficial activity was the trip to the state legislature.

Activity	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful
Visiting NCSU	9	3	3
Riding Public Transit	10	3	2
Visiting the Legislature	3	7	5
Visiting the Science Museum	6	7	2
Attending the mock course	6	5	4
Mentoring with Group Leaders	14	0	1

N = 15

Finally, participants were asked to assess the facilities and policies that were utilized during the EYE Retreat. According to the participants, our strongest area is our safety and security policies. Off campus procedures, the code of conduct, and communication procedures were ranked second highest. A majority of the participants found the cottages and gym to be either excellent or fair.

Facility / Policy	Excellent	Fair	Poor
Cottages	5	7	3
Gym	4	10	1
Safety and Security	10	5	0
Off Campus	8	7	0
Code of Conduct	8	7	0
Communication	8	7	0

N=15

Discussion

Generally, the desired outcomes of the 2012 EYE Retreat were met and the programming can be considered successful based upon the assessment data and written feedback provided. The three explicit goals of the 2012 EYE Retreat were to encourage self-advocacy, provide mentoring opportunities, and expose participants to a college environment. 14 out of 15 participants indicated that mentoring by group leaders was very helpful to them. Almost all participants mentioned meeting new friends with visual impairments and sharing experiences as positive aspects of attending. Informal conversations amongst group leaders and participants shared many of the hidden curriculum aspects of college life, such as social interactions and classroom etiquette that are not explicitly taught to incoming freshmen. Written comments suggest that leadership development, communication, and teamwork were also skills that were inadvertently conveyed to participants through their group interactions.

Further, the self-advocacy category of the pre and post assessments saw the greatest gains. As noted in the written comments, self-advocacy was informally and formally part of many aspects of the EYE Retreat. For instance, one participant commented about advocating for a cleaner bathroom in the cottages and yet others commented about learning to live in with roommates. Throughout the week, participants advocated for later bedtimes, going off campus during the evening hours, and seeking assistance from others. They also advocated for accommodations during their mock class. Written comments suggest that participants felt having a bedtime and off campus travel restrictions limited the college experience. These informal interactions could not have been planned, but provided an opportunity for participants to practice advocating for things across many settings.

In addition, the 2nd and 3rd most significant gains based on the pre and post assessment data were in the areas of accommodations and campus navigation. The written comments indicate that practical application of the skills taught to the participants was most beneficial. Not only did participants attend lectures on accommodations, but they had the ability to practice using and advocating for them. Also, activities at NC State were intentionally held at various sites to expose participants to troubleshooting ways to navigate a complex campus environment. A combination of walking and the Wolfline, NC State's campus shuttle service, were utilized so that participants understand the various options available to them in terms of travel.

Aside from the three explicitly stated EYE Retreat goals, it is clearly recognized that an array of skills, obstacles, and experiences actually come together to form a successful college experience.

Again, many of these situations simply cannot be planned in advance and just naturally occur. These informal learning opportunities, such as participating in classroom discussions and riding public transit, were included in the EYE Retreat as a way to encourage participant ownership of their own learning. However, no gains or regression were noted in the domain of participating in a classroom discussion, which indicates that more explicit instruction is necessary in this area. This could be linked to written comments that call for more interactive programming, rather than simple lectures. While a select few did interact with our professor, a majority did not and this very well may have lessened the impact of the course on their experience.

Additionally, the use of assistive technology is so highly individualized it is difficult to plan how and when a participant might use such an accommodation. However, assistive technology saw the 2nd lowest gains when compared to other categories. Written comments seem to reaffirm the desire to have more assistive technology incorporated into programming. Again, this may also be linked to the desire for more interactive experiences. Assistive technology has become such an integral part of higher education that it is essential that an emphasis be placed on this topic. Time and resources limit our ability to match participants with assistive technology that meets their individual needs, but more discussion around providing more opportunities for exploration of technology resources are needed, especially agencies that specialize in such matters.

Furthermore, while public transit and campus navigation received relatively high marks, written comments indicate a need for expanded use of public transit, more off campus experiences, and more orientation and mobility. When planning the EYE Retreat, orientation and mobility specific to NC State University was avoided simply because only one participant indicated an interest in attending the university specifically. It may be a drain on available resources and time to provide such an intensive service in such a short period of time for only a one time visit. The use of public transit was increased from one day in 2011 to three days in 2012. However, it should be noted that buses without the general public aboard were requested to provide transportation for participants. The size of the EYE Retreat group and our desire to take time to teach participants about various components of the city buses makes riding regular fixed routes with the general public impractical. Such an activity would significantly delay bus routes. This does hinder the true effect of riding public transit.

In order to build independence and foster a college atmosphere, evening activities were offered, but not specifically required. Participants chose which activities they wished to participate. However, informal and formal feedback seems to suggest that structured off campus activities as well as unstructured choices are desirable. Participants seemed to enjoy exploring the City of Raleigh and partaking in some of the many attractions the city has to offer. A significant majority enjoyed visiting and interacting with exhibits at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. The museum has both audible and tactile accommodations for those with visual impairments. Informal feedback from participants indicates that more time is needed to actually tour and experience the museum. This corresponds to other suggestions that more time be allocated to public transit and the entire program in general. It may be advisable to develop a theme each summer and limit programming to that topic so that more time may be dedicated to more specialized activities. Written and oral feedback suggested that the tour of the North Carolina Legislature was unpopular. Participants expressed concerns that the tour was geared more toward younger children and there was not much activity occurring in the building during

their visit because the legislature was not in session. As an alternative, it may be desirable to include a tour of the original Governor Morehead School site at Caswell Square.

Feedback regarding the mock course seemed to be positive. A majority of the participants found it to be useful in some way. However, the lower response rates here tend to suggest that other factors, such as the lecture component, made it somewhat undesirable for some. It must be noted that participants engaged in lectures and presentations each morning from various agencies, organizations, and individuals on a variety of topics prior to the start of the mock course. It may be advisable next year to select a morning time slot for the mock course and encourage other presentations to be more interactive to provide for a variety of learning mediums. Based on informal observations and conversations, it was clear that participants generally valued the experience of the mock course. Many unique topics of discussion were raised regarding accommodations in the classroom, including recording of lectures and what constitutes appropriate requests to the professor. Participants expressed the concern that they could not identify nonverbal cues from the professor or their peers during a class and sought feedback on how to address this problem. Additionally, those using assistive technology during the mock course were forced to identify the best seats in the room that allow for easy access to electrical outlets, information displayed via a projector, and the professor. Advocacy was informally built into the course as students realized that some of the course material was not readily accessible to them and they sought ways to make it more accessible. Finally, it was beneficial for participants to experience a hectic daily schedule along with a mock course to help them judge how to best manage their time, arrange schedules, and plan accordingly. This is reflected in some of the feedback as participants mention suggestions for shortening or lengthening various activities. They developed the skills to independently identify how to best manage their own time by offering these alternatives to us.

Overall, the 2012 EYE Retreat met or exceeded all of its explicit goals as noted above. Informal learning experiences were incorporated throughout the week and written comments suggest that many of those skills were also improved upon. An initiative this year to encourage more parental and community involvement with the EYE Retreat virtually was the development and use of an online blog. Announcements and information was posted weekly leading up to the EYE Retreat and daily once the participants arrived. During the week of the Retreat, forty five individuals visited the online blog. Planning for the 2013 Envisioning Youth Empowerment Retreat will begin in December of 2012 with the development of a timeline for distribution of applications, hiring of group leaders, and scheduling of activities. The EYE Retreat is proud to have partnered over the past four years with various organizations to make North Carolina a better place for visually impaired youth to live and study. Please check out our blog at www.eyeretreat.edublogs.com or contact Alan Chase, M.Ed., Program Coordinator for more information.

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