

Building a High School to College Peer Mediator Bridge

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In May of this year 25 people from across the country joined me at the Timber Ridge Retreat Center in Georgia to see if we could together begin doing a better job supporting high school mediation program alumni in their transitions to college and hopefully, future careers in the conflict resolution field.

As readers are probably aware, peer mediation programs have become quite common in high schools. Thousands of programs now exist across North America. Each year students with mediation training and experience graduate and a good many of them go on to college. However, while the number of mediation programs at colleges and universities is growing (225+ nationwide), few high school mediation program alumni ever connect with them. There is simply no system in place to help these young and skilled conflict resolvers connect with college and university programs. It is also very difficult for former peer mediators to identify other high school peer mediator alums at their new chosen university. Likewise, existing college level conflict resolution service and degree granting programs have no easy way to identify these especially promising students.

Our two and a half day meeting was organized and sponsored by the Conflict Management in Higher Education Resource Center (<http://www.campus-adr.org>) that I direct with special support coming from the Consortium on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at Georgia State University. The group that gathered in Georgia to work on the problem included high school mediators (current and former), community mediators, school conflict resolution program managers, guidance counseling staff, regional conflict resolution program coordinators, campus ombuds, university faculty from peace and conflict resolution academic programs, staff from university mediation programs, and national experts on conflict resolution in education. The group identified the existing barriers and began outlining a vision of the ideal high school to college mediator bridge and then set about drafting a work plan to address these concerns and begin to make things happen.

A number of primary tasks were identified as important starting places. A sampling of the tasks are provided below.

- Build and promote a national web site directed to young mediators
- Encourage local consortiums between colleges, high schools, and community

mediation centers

- Work with College and University admissions people to identify high school peer mediation students who have been accepted
- Develop a directory of current and past high school mediators
- Sponsor college-based summer institutes on mediation in education
- Build a peer mediation program alumni association
- Develop "peer mediator club" start-up kits for use at colleges that don't offer student mediation services currently
- Make available information about college programs to current peer mediators
- Establish online directory of college conflict resolution degree programs
- Locate corporate and government sponsorships
- Write up a career guide for young mediators
- Establish linkages to community mediation programs for students not going to college
- Nurture Youth mediator clubs in community mediation centers with internships on campuses
- Establish a national scholarship competition
- Include high school and college students in "peacemaker of the year" type awards
- Incorporate a "what's out there" at Colleges and Universities section into high school peer mediator training materials

The group's vision will require an initiative of broad scope to be truly effective. Ideally, the following kinds of people would get involved.

At the College and University Level

- Admissions recruiters
- Alumni
- Service learning coordinators
- Campus housing
- Campus police
- Ombuds
- Administrators
- Mediation Program Staff
- Academic CR degree programs

At High Schools

- School counselors
- Conflict Resolution Trainers
- Principals
- School board superintendents
- School librarians
- Student mediators

In the Community

- Youth mediators not in school
- Community mediation program staff

At the National and Regional Level

- Liasons to National Conflict Resolution Organizations
- Liasons to School Professional Organizations
- Liasons to Higher Education Professional and Scholarly Organizations
- Liasons to State-level networks for youth and violence prevention
- Consortiums of Colleges and Universities

We think the high school to college peer mediator bridge is a good idea whose time has finally come. We are currently sorting out how to best coordinate our distributed efforts and secure the funds needed to make happen. If you are interested in getting involved with the initiative in some way, you can contact me (Bill Warters) via email at: director@campus-adr.org and we'll add you to our contact list.