

## We Tie'd the Tizzle: A Unique Strategy for Engaging Collegiate Men

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If you are a professional wedding directly with students, we are sure you may have noticed male students experiencing difficulty developing positive relationships at the institution. Many have a hard time identifying and building relationships with positive role models – especially male figures. Yes, we have many confident and talented male student leaders that are active on our campuses, but that group pales in comparison to the numbers of men on campus we do not reach. So, what are we doing about the rest of the male student population? At Old Dominion University, we are striving to find innovative and engaging ways to capture, connect and positively influence these young men.

Engaging college men in meaningful interactions to impact and enhance their collegiate experiences is a challenge to say the least! This challenge is also an opportunity for campus professionals to think outside the traditional programming “box” as we consider our outreach efforts. Typically, we have attempted to connect college men through events like intramural sports activities; however, we sometimes forget about the male students not interested in athletic activities or those who are unable to participate.

The timing of our program last Spring semester could not have been a more perfect response to the challenge of meeting the needs of our male students. Through collaboration with student and professional staff, we began creating a program designed to teach students how to properly tie and wear neck ties. We determined that it was important for students to not just get information and learn to tie a tie but also to have something tangible to take away from the program; each attendee was given a neck tie to practice with and take home. One challenge in purchasing a large number of neckties was identifying a bulk seller at a reasonable cost. We successfully overcame this challenge this year

through various online vendors via Amazon.com. We were able to reduce costs by almost \$100 dollars.

Having experienced great success with this event last year, we desired to enhance this program in its second year. To that end, we collaborated with our division of Student Engagement and Enrollment Services (SEES) partnering with colleagues working to engage our male students. This year, we invited our Director of Residence Education, Dr. Leon McClinton Jr. to present to the attendees. Dr. McClinton's commitment to student learning and success was evident in his enthusiasm to be part of this engagement opportunity. We knew with his involvement and guidance, the presentation would be a success.

Resident Assistants (RAAs) in our area worked diligently to identify students who would not only enjoy, but benefit from this program. In addition to RA marketing, great care was given to creating a program title and effective advertisements that would speak specifically to male students. The event was finally named: “Tie the Tizzle, Get the Jobby



Bizzle.” The title – inspired by Snoop Dogg (Lion) – was selected to catch the reader’s attention, inspire curiosity and maybe even a laugh! Further, prominent hip hop artists dressed in professional attire donned our advertisements. In retrospect, who would have thought using language and images not necessarily associated with professionalism would have been so effective in advertising a program about getting the “Jobby Bizzle”? There were approximately fifty people that attended the program this year.

The presentation had two learning outcomes: 1) Attendees will understand how to present themselves in a professional manner; 2) Attendees will be able to tie a tie and/or bowtie. Dr. McClinton’s presentation included content regarding use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), how to prepare for the interview, tips on interviewing attire, attention to detail as well as follow up after the interview. Using volunteers from the audience, Dr. McClinton also gave active examples of how to respond to questions during an interview. At the conclusion of the presentation, many students remained to learn to tie the “tizzles”. Our divisional colleagues interacted with students in small groups providing personalized lessons on how to tie their ties, bowties, and even creating a bowtie from a full length tie!

This year, we were able to elevate the quality of the presentation and learning outcomes for students. The intentional and informative presentation facilitated by Dr. McClinton really helped to make this program a success. It was very rewarding for both the students and the professionals to have the opportunity to engage and interact in a safe place. Students may feel marginalized when they are confronted with a task or skill they do not know – like knowing how to properly knot a tie. Students, particularly our collegiate men, that might not have

been willing to seek out the assistance of a peer were actively engaged and excited about learning to tie the “tizzles.” Not only was the program a success, but now, it is more likely that these young men will come to other programs and/or seek advice or assistance from the professionals with whom they made a connection. Positive interactions like these pay dividends!

Our invited divisional partners involved felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that students had tangible take-aways: they learned a new skill in tying the tie and also received one to wear in their various professional/career building experiences. Moreover the professionals were thrilled that students got valuable information from professionals invested in their success of college students and learned about how to make a great first impression to potential employers. One divisional participant remarked that “it was truly a wonderful program – I have bragged about it to many colleagues!” Another concurred with that sentiment, going on to mention he “thoroughly enjoyed being part of the program” as it was a highlight of his week. We are elated to see this program serve as the prequel to the “Men of SHRS” day which will include divisional administrators wearing bowties to work. We anticipate that some of our program attendees will wear their new ties and bowties to commemorate this event.

While the program was geared towards men, female attendees received valuable information on interviewing as well as learned how to tie a tie/bowtie. As our institution continues to tackle the challenge of engaging our collegiate men, we are proud and excited about how this program has impacted their lives. We anticipate continued growth, enhancements and influence in our collegiate male community.

“The first program that we [Marketing & Organizational Promotions Committee] piloted was the “SEAHO Solo” Program where we offered each solo delegate from their institution the opportunity to join other solo delegates at the opening luncheon. We were able to network and connect with one another on the commonality of being single delegates. Not only were able to network and connect at the luncheon but we were also able to establish “SEAHO Buddies”. Our second piloted program was the HBCU social. At this event we took a group of professionals that were employed at HBCUs, alumni of HBCUs, or just interested in HBCUs to an open forum dinner. We discussed challenges and successes that are different for HBCUs.”

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