

## **Implementation of the project**

I implemented my project on the week of February 21. I ended the week of April 30. We started with 15 students and about 8 to 11 would show up every session. I structured The Sesa Wo Suban Project by alternating college mentoring themes with Critical Black Studies themes. I did this with the intention of fulfilling the mission of my community partner, Community Teen Coalition (CTC) and my individual mission of bridging college mentoring and culturally-relevant pedagogy to transform the Black students of Metro Atlanta into agents of change who push for liberation in their communities. I wanted to demystify the college admission process, so students would feel comfortable with applying and attending college to fulfill their academic and career goals and aspirations. I created templates and journal prompts that would generate responses that they could use for the common application. I also created journal prompts for the Black history and culture sessions that would allow students to organically develop their personal Black radical social justice toolbox, language, and ethic.

## **Needs Addressed**

The 15 students that I serve are Upward students from Banneker High School in College Park, GA and Griffin High School in Griffin, GA. They come from low-income backgrounds and attend majority Black schools. Both schools are underfunded and have poor counseling departments that do not adequately prepare students for college. I addressed these needs by pairing students with Brandeis undergraduate college peer admission mentors. I also donated subject section specific SAT and ACT books to the Community Teen Coalition Library for student use, because many students do not have access to standardized testing resources. I also held biweekly college admissions sessions, including College Q&A panels with students from Harvard University and Columbia University. The following college admission topics were addressed: Standardized Testing, Creating College Admission Plan, Writing Common Application Essay, and College Essay Brainstorming, and Choosing a College.

While the students are African-American, they were unable to articulate their lived experiences and display understanding of the cultural nuance of Black American Culture. This can largely be attributed to how the educational system is dominated by white hegemonic narratives. Moreover, the classroom has been weaponized by white supremacy to reinforce white superiority. This has left Black students with many traumatic first impressions of “education” on the lives of Black students. Therefore, I sought to reimagine the classroom as a space of liberation as it has left many traumatic first impressions of “education” on the lives of Black students. In my biweekly Black cultural session, we covered various topics in Black Studies, ranging from, music, history, art, and culture. I also created a Black Studies Library and gave each student a personalized book based on their expressed passions in Black Studies. For the first time, students were given the space to voice and write about their lived experience and opinions about their identity, history, and current events.

## **Impact Assessment**

I measured the impact of my work through the personal relationships that I formed with my students. I held two community classroom check-in's where I asked students what was helpful and what was unhelpful. We also discussed their career aspirations and specialized interest in the Black Studies field. Establishing community norms and getting to know the students informally made students feel comfortable with emailing and texting me about any and all concerns they had as students of The Sesa Wo Suban project, their Black Studies knowledge, and the College Admission plan. Students were extremely busy with their private, family, and school lives, so paying close attention and taking notes on student behavior and reactions was more generative in measuring impact rather than requiring students to complete a written survey.

## **Results of Evaluation**

Students who I perceived to be apathetic and unresponsive were actually participatory. I found that the Zoom platform made it challenging to measure student impact, however my 1:1 conversations informed me about student participation as some students feel more comfortable with their cameras off. Students expressed that the resources and sessions provided them with the resources they needed to feel more prepared and comfortable with the college admissions process. They also expressed this was the first time in their educational career that they were given the opportunity to express their opinions about Black history and culture. Students were saddened when The Sesa Wo Suban Project came to a close and would text/email me on days where we had break weeks asking for more information and resources.

## **Unexpected Successes and Obstacles**

There was a lot of conflict with the Community Teen Coalition (CTC) mission and The Sesa Wo Suban project's mission. The CTC's mission statement did not include student acquisition of history and culture, so they tended to place more emphasis on the college mentoring component of The Sesa Wo Suban project. This lack of acknowledgement of the Black history and culture by my community partner caused some miscommunication and understanding to arise. Some of the CTC faculty members categorized my lessons as "too political," but I had to remind them the importance of including Black history and culture in the classroom even though it may come across as "too political" and "divisive". In reality, the CTC faculty members just needed time adjusting to a pedagogy that was different from the white status quo.

## **Current Status and Future Plans**

I am in service to The Sesa Wo Suban project anytime. They reach out to me to extend resources and facilitate events and talks almost every week. The students are familiar with my name and work and know they can always count on me as a mentor and supporter. In the future, I

plan to relaunch The Sesa Wo Suban Project again with more specific topics in Black Studies, such as Black Feminism.

### **Reflection**

I hope we shift from this fixed, cynical approach to social justice work that has an energy that is vibrant and transgressive. We cannot simply accept the laws, the system, ultimately the fate that has been dealt to us. We must constantly push for a better tomorrow as our today is not currently living up to our standards. Rather than accepting the system, why not start from scratch and build something new? I fear we have subconsciously accepted our lot in life and will not push beyond our limited perspective.

It is widely known that the American society is unjust and it is even becoming more widely accepted that we need to dismantle the current system of power in America; however, we still have states like Texas who have banned the inclusion of Critical Race Theory. How do we connect our theory to our everyday work? It is through grassroots grants and activism that tend directly to the needs and wants of our communities that our absence in the spaces where students spend the most of their time: the classroom.

### **Final Budget**

The budget is attached.