

Construction Panel Discussion at San Luis Obispo High School

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Jake Ornellas and Morgan Conway conducted a panel discussion during the “tutorial” session on Monday, May 22, 2023, in the San Luis Obispo High School theater with three guest speakers, asking them questions about their respective organizations, then opening the floor for students to ask questions. Jake Ornellas and Morgan Conway also distributed flyers to students which included information about the organizations discussed and a survey to gauge student interest. This project was designed to expose high school students to opportunities they have in the construction industry as well as to create a connection between Cal Poly Construction Management and San Luis Obispo High School, allowing for the possibility of future projects together.

Key Words: Panel Discussion, High School, Construction, Skilled Trade

Introduction

The project consisted of a panel discussion held at San Luis Obispo High School. This discussion involved three different guest speakers from various construction organizations. Jeong Woo represented Cal Poly Construction Management and the ACE Mentorship Program, Jonathan Duran represented the Southwest Mountain States Regional Council of Carpenters, and Shari Brunner represented the National Electrical Contractors Association. The presentation was held in the San Luis Obispo High School theater on Monday, May 22nd. Jake Ornellas and Morgan Conway asked each speaker questions, but students had the opportunity to ask their own questions as well. The goal of this project was to expose high school students to different opportunities they have in the construction industry after graduation as well as promote future engagement between Cal Poly Construction Management and San Luis Obispo High School.

Background

The problem this project aimed to solve was the lack of interest and knowledge of the opportunities high school students have in construction after graduation. There has been a significant decline in young people entering the skilled trades over the past few decades. This project provided information about two large trade unions, the carpenters union, and the electricians union, that are local to the

central coast area. Besides providing points of contact and information to students about the trades, information about Cal Poly Construction Management and the ACE Mentorship Program was provided to students. This presentation gave students concrete information about how they can enter this career field. Not only can they become successful, but they can fill the need for labor within the growing construction industry in California. The preparation for this project included several classes and other academic endeavors that helped with the public speaking and effective communication of the project. The project required a lot of coordination with each guest speaker as well as the high school to set up the logistics of the project, including reserving the space, communicating with the principle, and submitting background check forms from each person present. Construction Management lab classes were very presentation driven. This helped a lot with being comfortable with public speaking. Additionally, being Captain of the Cal Poly Heavy Civil Team in the ASC Reno competition, made all the difference in speaking clearly in front of a crowd. The skills learned in class and in Reno allowed the presentation to be successful.

Planning

After partnering with fellow construction management student Jake Ornellas, and being granted approval, we contacted the principal of San Luis Obispo high school, Rollin Dickinson, to find a time we could come in as guest speakers. We signed up for a “tutorial” period from 2:10-2:48pm on Monday, May 22, 2023, that would take place in the school theater. During these “tutorial” periods, students can sign up for guest speakers they want to hear from. Next, we contacted Jeong Woo to present on Cal Poly Construction Management and the ACE Mentorship Program. We contacted Jonathan Duran to present on the Southwest Mountain States Regional Council of Carpenters. We also contacted Shari Brunner to present on the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA). We talked to Jeong Woo and Jonathan Duran in person on campus about our project, then followed up by phone call and email. We contacted Shari Brunner about the project by email. Jake Ornellas and I decided who we would have as guest speakers based on the variety, size, and importance of each respective organization. We reasoned that the carpenter’s union and the electrician’s union are both very large and well-known. Being a part of Cal Poly CM motivated us to include the program we ourselves are passionate about. Together, these three professionals offered information about a range of career paths for students to follow, as well as ways to get involved while still in high school. After each guest speaker agreed to be present, we submitted guest speaker background check forms, that Rollin Dickinson provided us, to the school for every person who would be there, including ourselves. Then, I created a presentation agenda on a word document with a list of the questions asked, a visual aid for the panel discussion, and a flyer that included a google survey for the students to fill out. When the agenda and flyers were finished, I emailed the guests the document so they would be ready. The questions we asked were basic enough to allow the guest to have more freedom on what they wanted to talk about. Asking them to introduce themselves, followed by a question about their organization, was all we needed to fill the allotted time for each speaker. Lastly, we coordinated with the high school and every guest speaker prior to the day of the panel discussion regarding logistics, microphones, and setting up the screen for the slideshow. This communication prior to presentation day was all done by email and phone call.

Results

The presentation started with a three-minute introduction, where I explained why each guest was there and what organization they were representing. Then I handed off the microphone to Jake Ornellas to ask the guests questions. Starting with Jeong Woo, each guest was allotted roughly 10 minutes to introduce themselves, answer questions posed to them by Jake Ornellas, as well as expand on any

topic of their choosing with their remaining time. After each guest finished speaking, we opened the floor for any students to ask the guests questions they had about an organization or their experience in the industry. The first guest to speak was Jeong Woo. After he introduced himself, the questions posed to him included “What can the ACE mentorship program provide high school students with?” and “What opportunities are available for Cal Poly Construction Management students and graduates?” The next guest to speak was Jonathan Duran, who after his introduction was asked “What is the Southwest Mountain States Regional Council of Carpenters?” and “What are the benefits of becoming a union carpenter?” The final guest, Shari Brunner, introduced herself then was asked “What is the National Electrical Contractors Association?” and “What does NECA provide for electrical contractors?” When we opened the floor to students for the Q & A portion of the presentation, at first there were no student questions. We utilized our backup questions to fill the time for a few minutes. But quickly students gained confidence and raised their hands to ask the guests questions of their own. We noticed a large amount of interest towards Cal Poly Construction Management with many questions from students asking about internship opportunities while at Cal Poly, how they can become more competitive for admission, and about each of our experiences in the industry so far. Also answered were multiple questions about the benefits of being in trade unions, how paid apprenticeships work, and how students can enter the trades after high school graduation.

Construction Panel Discussion

Jeong Woo	Jonathan Duran	Shari Brunner
ACE Mentor Program & Cal Poly Construction Management	Southwest Mountain States Regional Council of Carpenters	National Electrical Contractors Association
 CAL POLY Construction Management COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE & ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN	 SOUTHWEST CARPENTERS	 NECA NATIONAL ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION
 ACE MENTOR PROGRAM ARCHITECTURE • CONSTRUCTION • ENGINEERING		

Figure 1. Slideshow



Figure 2. Presentation



Figure 3. Flyer

Lessons Learned

This construction panel discussion exposed roughly 70 high school students present to organizations and career paths in the construction industry they otherwise would not have known about, while allowing them to interact with the guest speakers and ask questions of their choosing. This type of conversational format, as opposed to a presentation with only one or two speakers, allowed for multiple guest speakers to answer student questions together, voicing different points of view. Based on the number of students present, the topics of discussion, and the level of interaction with the students, we believe we made an impact on their lives by showing them options and next steps they can take to enter a successful career in the industry upon graduating high school. Besides teaching them more about opportunities with Cal Poly Construction Management, the Carpenters Union, and the Electricians Union, we also showed them two opportunities to become involved in construction while still in high school, namely the ACE Mentorship Program and the Girls Build Summer Academy. The survey we created was accessible through a QR code we placed on the front side of the flyer. Although there were 14 responses out of around 70 students present, the survey results indicated that there were an even mix of ages present. Most students that responded intended to pursue college for construction management after graduation. Half of the students that responded had family in the construction industry, and half did not. Most respondents were interested in entering the construction industry after graduation. Most of the respondents were also interested in learning more about Cal Poly Construction Management in the future. The presentation at San Luis Obispo High School went very smoothly considering it has not been done before under the current high school administration. We were very fortunate to have clear communication with the principal of the school, Rollin Dickinson, about the logistics of the presentation and what was required of us to speak to the students. The guest speakers we invited represented a variety of options for high school students to pursue. I learned it is never too early to plan logistics. I was able to gather all the background check forms from each guest in time, however I would have preferred to submit them further ahead of time in case any guest speaker had to cancel. I would also have a backup speaker in case this happened. Three guest speakers were preferable for the variety of organizations represented, however, in the future two guest speakers would allow for more in-depth conversation for the time allotted. In the 38 minutes of time

we had, some guest speakers could not speak as much as others, however the speaking time was based largely on the students' questions. This project should be continued by other Cal Poly Construction Management students in the future, as it has the potential to increase collaboration between Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo High School, with both students and faculty. There is a lot of potential for Cal Poly students to show the high school students what they have learned in school and about other organizations or career paths they have been exposed to in the construction industry.

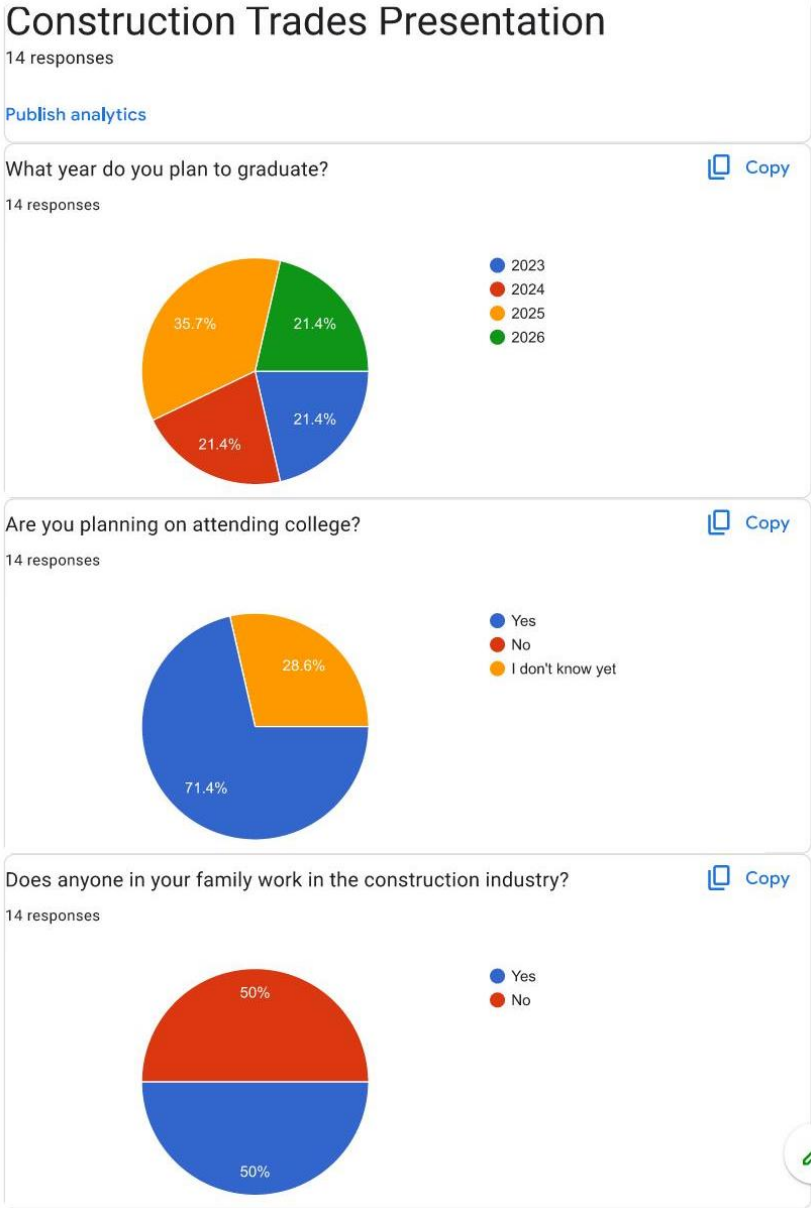
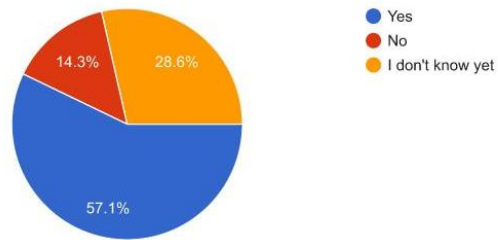


Figure 4. Survey Results

Are you interested in entering the construction industry?

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14 responses



Are you interested in any of the career paths shown today?

 Copy

13 responses

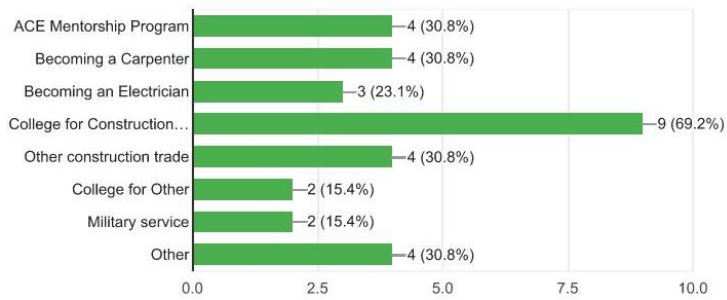


Figure 5. Survey Results Continued

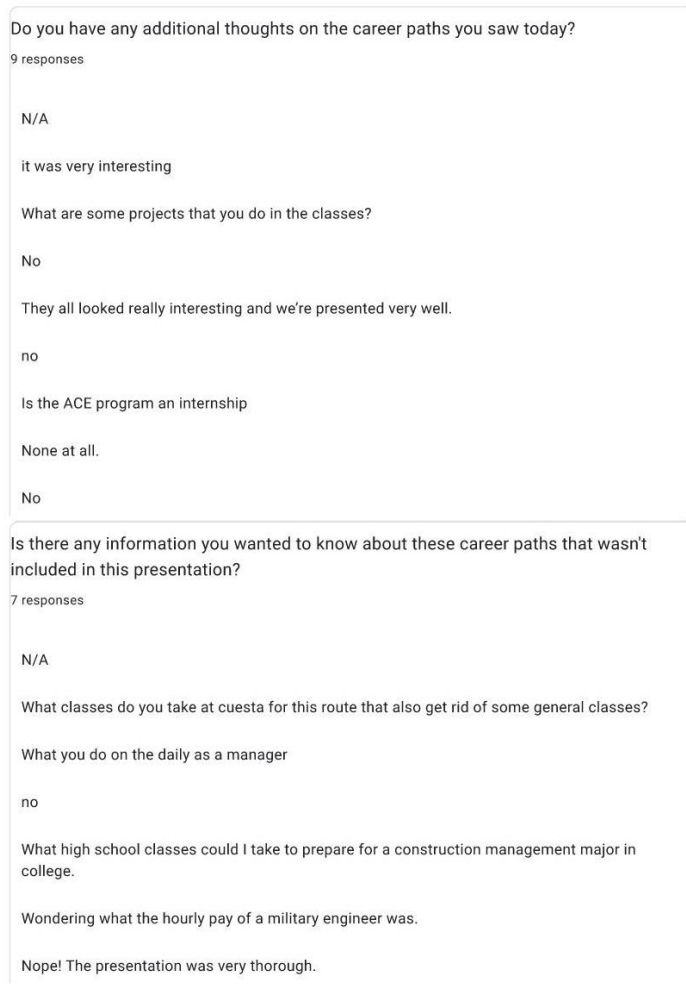


Figure 6. Survey Results Continued

Conclusion

This project consisted of a panel discussion held at San Luis Obispo High School on May 22. Three different guest speakers represented different avenues in the construction industry for high school students to consider upon graduation. Each speaker was able to talk about their individual experience they have had in their careers in the industry. Jeong Woo represented Cal Poly Construction Management and the ACE Mentorship Program, Jonathan Duran represented the Southwest Mountain States Regional Council of Carpenters, and Shari Brunner represented the National Electrical Contractors Association. This project's goal was to expose high school students to different opportunities they have in the construction industry after graduation as well as promote future engagement between Cal Poly Construction Management and San Luis Obispo High School. The project gave them the information and tools they need to enter the industry, and surveyed their interests for use by students in the future who may conduct a similar presentation at the high school.