United States Army Corps of Engineers Info Session at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo

Gabriel Vesneski
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA

Gabriel Vesneski facilitated an Info Session on Thursday, November 2, at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo for the United States Army Corps of Engineers Sacramento District Civil Works. Three guest speakers from the Sacramento District Civil Works office presented their educational background, experience as employees for the Corps of Engineers, occupational benefits, and finally opened a question-and-answer forum for the students attending the Info Session. Upon completion of the Info Session, a survey was provided for attendees, in order to track interest in employment or internship opportunities provided by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Finally, there was a networking portion for all students interested in internship or employment opportunities. This project was designed to expose prospective students to career opportunities provided by the Corps of Engineers, and to foster a relationship between the United States Army Corps of Engineers and Cal Poly Construction Management. In the future, it is encouraged for similar info sessions to be conducted for the students attending Cal Poly either as construction management or engineering undergraduates.

Key Words: Info Session, United States Army Corps of Engineers, Civil Works, Construction Management, Survey

Introduction

This project was an Info Session that took place at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo. This project was designed to expose students to career opportunities within the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as outline the function of the Army Corps of Engineers civil works in California. This Info Session was facilitated and presented by Gabriel Vesneski, as well as three guest speakers from the United States Army Corps of Engineers Sacramento District Civil Works. The guest speakers were Area Engineer Robert Caputo, Professional Engineer Earl Chow, and Active-Duty Army Engineer Major Stewart McDougall. The guest speakers showcased the organizational structure
of the Army Corps of Engineers, different career paths, and active projects currently under the Sacramento District Civil Works. Info Session attendees were given the opportunity to ask the guest speakers questions, as well as a networking opportunity following the presentation.

Background

This project was designed to expose students to the career opportunities the Army Corps of Engineers provides for graduating students, or soon to be graduating students. Many of the Info Sessions at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, are geared towards Heavy Civil, Commercial General Contractors and Private Firms. This project provided information about the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and career paths for students graduating with a B.S. in Construction Management, or various engineering undergraduate fields of study.

Along with information provided about the Army Corps of Engineers, contact information from the guest speakers was provided to prospective students interested in pursuing a career with the Corps of Engineers whether in a military or civilian capacity. This Info Session provided students with information on internship opportunities, as well as how to apply for employment with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Planning Process

With the delivery of my Senior Project, I was highly interested in delivering an engaging experience to students. I believed that an Info Session would accomplish this goal as students are encouraged to participate, ask questions, and network with employers. In addition, I have been contracted with the United States Army and am committed to serving four years after finishing my undergraduate at Cal Poly. I have known for a while that the Army Corps of Engineers has career opportunities for those in the service, as well as civilians. As I had this very brief knowledge, I believed the Info Session would be a very unique and eye opening experience for those interested in attending, as well as myself.
opportunity, as they are Cal Poly Alumni, and were highly interested in networking with Cal Poly students.

As a team coordinating to run this Info Session, we began routinely meeting via zoom to discuss travel logistics, as well as presentation date availabilities, and building our Info Session PowerPoint. The PowerPoint consisted of the Army Corps of Engineers history, scopes of work, career opportunities, organizational structure, and active projects in the Sacramento District. There was also a survey created for the Info Session attendees to record their levels of interest and knowledge about the Army Corps of Engineers. Planning and finalizing guest speaker availabilities was difficult amidst a potential government shut down in October of 2023; however, it was decided November 2 would be the optimal date when all guest speakers would be available to present. While coordinating with my guest speakers throughout the summer, I routinely updated my SME with developments.

After November 2 was confirmed as the date of the Info Session, I coordinated with Emma Blair to reserve a classroom for the Info Session. I was provided with a 5 PM reservation for classroom B106 in the Construction Innovation Center. Additionally, I coordinated with Rachell Smith to send out a department wide email to Construction Management students regarding the Info Session. This email provided the details of the Info Session such as the location, date, time, and guest speakers who would be present. Michael Brennan advertised the Info Session to his students in his Commercial Construction Management class. In addition, I handed out flyers to students pursuing undergraduate degrees in either construction management or various fields of engineering.

Execution

At the beginning of the presentation, I briefly explained the Army Corps of Engineers history, famous project locations, current missions, active civil works, and career fields. Following this, guest speakers Robert Caputo, Earl Chow, and Major McDougall introduced themselves and began presenting their specific portions of the Info Session. The guest speakers presented the organizational structure, locations, employment benefits, work experience, and active projects currently under the Army Corps of Engineers.

Following the presentation, there was a question-and-answer forum for the student attendees of the Info Session. The first question was asked by Construction Management instructor Michael Brennan. He asked, “How can the students find out about applying for the Corps of Engineers?” The guest speakers replied that job listings are found on usajobs.gov; however, the guest speakers have direct hire authority. Another student asked, “What would an electrical engineer do on one of your projects?” It was answered that they would typically be working within the scopes of power distribution, low-voltage, fire alarms, communications, as well as in-house designs. Another student who is currently studying aerospace engineering asked Major McDougall, “With your educational background of also studying aerospace engineering, how often have you used that education in your job?” Major McDougall responded that he has not used his education of aerospace engineering in his job as he is currently a project manager with the Sacramento District Civil Works for the Army Corps of Engineers. During this portion of the Info Session, it was apparent that there was significant interest from the students in attendance, as many of the questions regarded internships and if their respective field of study would be applicable in the Army Corps of Engineers. Many of the students looked motivated when hearing that their respective undergraduate majors would be greatly welcomed by the Army Corps of Engineers.
Figure 1. Info Session Flyer

Figure 2. Info Session Presentation
This info session for the Army Corps of Engineers exposed 21 students at Cal Poly with Construction Management and Engineering degrees to the employment opportunities and organizational structure of the business, while fostering an opportunity for dialogue and questions for the students attending. This info session, combined with the diverse educational background of all guest speakers, highlighted the breadth of employment capability that the United States Army Corps of Engineers has for college graduates. Many of the students attending had heard of the Army Corps of Engineers but did not have a thorough understanding of the national influence they have for the completion of public projects, as well as the maintenance of accessible waterways throughout the country. With the variety of guest speakers present, their unique scopes of work, and networking opportunity, I believe this info session positively impacted those interested in pursuing employment with the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

It is often misinterpreted that civil works employees under the Corps of Engineers are all active service members, however it was revealed 90% of them are civilians. Following the info session there was a survey for attendees to fill out. This was utilized to record responses and view statistics amongst attendees. Out of the 21 student attendees there were 16 recorded responses. The vast majority had heard about the info session by word of mouth or advertisements and were either studying Construction Management or a specific field of Engineering. In addition, a vast majority of the students would like to continue to work on the West Coast following their education, and either had a neutral or high interest in the United States Army Corps of Engineers as a place of employment. The info session went very well, even though the Corps of Engineers have not given an info session at Cal Poly before.

I was very grateful to have constant connection with my guest speakers through the planning process. Having prior knowledge, I would be presenting the info session in the Fall, I worked proactively through the summer to make initial contact and coordinate all logistics. The diversity of the guest speakers I gathered highlighted the vastness of educational background the Corps of Engineers choose to employ. The diversity of guest speakers catered to all attendees and confirmed a viable opportunity
for employment if interested. All guest speakers were very enthusiastic and excited to talk about their work experience with the Corps of Engineers. The info session ran for one hour, with a networking opportunity included at the completion. This project should be continued in the future, as it allows for the continued relationship between Cal Poly Construction Management and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. There is high potential for Cal Poly Construction Management students to find employment through the Corps of Engineers and have a very unique opportunity to be involved in their projects.

Based upon survey results, almost all info session attendees had little to no knowledge about the capacity in which the Corps of Engineers operates prior to attending. However, after experiencing the the Info Session, 94% of survey takers recorded either a neutral to highly interested response to future employment with the Corps of Engineers.

**Lessons Learned**

Through self-reflection of this Info Session, I created a summary of what was positive, and what could be changed to make a similar info session run smoother in the future. First, the amount of material and information presented was very effective, however there was too much. The Info Session and question and answer period was ninety minutes. In the future, this would have to be condensed to a maximum of 60 minutes to maintain viewer interest. In addition, there was a slight disconnect between guest speakers and attendees knowledge of the Corps of Engineers. Many attendees did not understand the organizational structure of the Corps of Engineers, and guest speaker Robert Caputo did a very good job of breaking it down for the attendees once viewers’ confusion was realized. Finally, there were many students that stuck around following the Info Session to exchange information with the guest speakers for internship or employment opportunities. Besides the length of the presentation and the extraneous information presented, it went well.
Figure 5. Survey Results Continued
Conclusion

With the completion of this info session, it is highly encouraged to continue similar senior projects in the future. The importance of keeping the info session on a strict timeline and avoiding it running too long to maintain viewer interest and attention is very high. In addition, the implementation of a diverse and knowledgeable guest speaker cast is important and very beneficial. Finally, the inclusion of a networking portion following the info session was successful, and allowed many students to exchange contact information with guest speakers. The goal of this project was to expose Cal Poly students to the employment opportunities held under the Army Corps of Engineers in a civilian capacity, as well as foster a relationship between Cal Poly Construction Management and the Army Corps of Engineers. This project provided information and employment opportunities to interested students, and surveyed and recorded students’ interest in the Corps of Engineers for future senior projects that may be similar.