

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 3 , Title: Grant Writing

What did you learn about this competency? Provide a 750 to 1,000-word self-assessment of your learning, i.e., write an argument to support of your claim about what you learned. Be sure to provide specific examples and reasoning to support your claim about what you learned and how you applied what you learned. Do not just tell us what you *did*; tell us what you *learned* and how you applied it.

The grant writing process can be very intimidating, especially for a novice like myself. However, there were many important lessons learned from the experience I had with writing the grant proposal that was subsequently awarded for \$86,000 in 2004 (an approximate \$117,232 today using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics). The focus of the grant was to educate students on managing (and possibly avoid over-borrowing) student loan debt at Emory University. With the national student debt exceeding \$1.2 trillion dollars at the time (today it exceeds \$1.5 trillion, I knew that I had to do more for Emory students than what was currently being offered. To begin the grant writing process, I learned to strictly follow the Request for Proposal (RFP) guidelines. I learned how to effectively respond to negative feedback from those assigned to review my proposals. I learned that for the grant to be impactful to my organization, I must carefully consider the mission and goals of my organization. Equally as important, I learned that I must have a strategy of how the program will sustain long-term with decrease dependence on the grant.

I've learned how vitally important it is to strictly follow the guidelines of the RFP if one is given by the grant-maker. The RFP (Request for Proposal) gives detailed information that the applicant needs to know, such as the application guidelines, the deadlines, required attachments, timelines to respond to any follow-up questions, and more. Instead of reaching out and soliciting help from an experience grant-writer before beginning to write my proposal, I decided to jump right in. How hard could it be anyway? I had the passion, the great ideas, and the detailed RFP. However, in my over-zealous attempt to persuade the reviewers that my cause was one of great merit, I dumped a lot of student loan indebtedness and student loan default data into my proposal—more data than what was either necessary or requested. After much back and forth, I realized that successful grant writing must first start with a thorough understanding of the requirements and a good business plan that marries my innovative ideas. By following the RFP guidelines, the business plan will progress the way it should. By cultivating the business plan, I was able forecast expenditures that included short and long-term costs that I had not considered beforehand. The RFP taught me that building forecasts with any degree of accuracy takes a lot of time. I learned that a successful grant writing outcome requires thoughtful planning.

Despite all my efforts to address all points outlined in the RFP, there were many times I was required to provide the reviewer with additional information or clarification. I've learned how to respond to discouraging feedback from the reviewers and resubmit my grant proposal with full anticipation of a more positive outcome. Part of the problem that I had with my submission is that I made many assumptions. The Financial Aid industry is full of acronyms such as FAFSA (Free Application for Student Aid), EFC (Expected Family Contribution), FFEL (Federal Family Education Loan), COA (Cost of Attendance), BRR (Borrower's Rights and Responsibilities), CDR (Cohort Default Rate), DRAP (Default Reduction Assistance Program), TIV (Title IV of the higher Education Act), and so much more. I've learned to never abbreviate words or use acronyms, and to always add a phrase or sentence to describe certain legislation or concepts despite the industry that the grant proposal is being reviewed by. It is my responsibility as a grant-writer to make the reviewer's job as easy as I possibly can. When they can evaluate the merit of my proposal, it will be reflected in the scoring. I learned that when being asked to clarify data, wording, reasons for budgeted items, or on-going operational costs, it is important to simplify my responses, yet demonstrate the use of thoughtful processing.

I learned that successful grant writing requires careful consideration of my organization's missions and goals. As innovated as my ideas may have seemed to be, I realized, half-way in, that unless I got buy-in from administrators in

Tab IV—Work Experience**Competency #3** , Title: Grant Writing**Continued**

my organization, my efforts may be much more difficult, if not fruitless. To get buy-in, or at least some level of support from colleagues and top administrators, I had to demonstrate that the goals for the program would be far-reaching across campus. My department's mission of, "...administering programs with integrity and equity," meant that I had to think broadly—How can these initiatives positively impact all (or at least most) students on campus—not just those who had loan debt? After thoughtfully editing my ideas to ensure that I could establish success markers that supported our missions, I solicited letters of support from colleague and other administrators at my place of employment. I learned that using my department's mission and goals as my guide, helped to drive the vision and objectives that I had for the funding.

Another insight that I gained from writing a grant is that I must always create a long-term sustainability plan for the program that outlives the life of the grant. Although my projections included both financial and operational costs for the three-year grant period, I did not carefully consider how the program would sustain on its own after it was no longer supported by the grant. However, because of the positive impact over the short term of the grant period, and the upfront buy-in from colleagues and administrators, resources were made available to pursue long-term debt management and financial literacy goals and outreach programming. I've learned that projecting the long-term future of my initiatives with decrease dependence on the grant funds is essential to sustaining the programs that I create.

I've learned that grant writing is a full commitment of time, hard work, practice, and effort--with no guarantee of approval. This proposal process exceeded a year before I submitted it to the reviewers. It was, however, a process that had lasting impact on my department and the Emory community. It created resources that were, at the time, unattainable. It allowed a brighter spotlight to be shined on areas that did not receive the attention that it should—financial literacy and debt management education. I've learned to be open to criticism, to strategize for the program's future sustainability.

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 4 , Title: Communication in Leadership

What did you learn about this competency? Provide a 750 to 1,000-word self-assessment of your learning, i.e., write an argument to support of your claim about what you learned. Be sure to provide specific examples and reasoning to support your claim about what you learned and how you applied what you learned. Do not just tell us what you *did*; tell us what you *learned* and how you applied it.

Effective communication is essential to establishing strong relationships. As a manager in my department, it is important for me to know how to communicate within all elements of my organization, whether it is with members on my team, students and parents, faculty, internal staff members, or my external partners. I learned to identify and then adapt my communication style based on the group that I am communicating with. I've learned that to be an effective communicative leader, I had to be transparent in my communication by being open, involved, and actively sharing and seeking feedback. This transparency will help establish rapport and build trust. I've also learned that effective communication can affect change, influence public opinion and policies, and can raise awareness. I have become a skilled communicative leader as a result.

Daily, I am placed in different positions when my communication skills are tested. From one moment to the next, I may be faced with an irate parent who is dissatisfied with either the service that they had experienced or was simply unhappy with the amount of aid they were awarded. The next moment, I may be faced with visits from stern FBI agents needing documentation of a prior student's federal aid status to determine employment eligibility with the agency. On the other hand, I may be in a Financial Aid Liaison Committee or in Financial Literacy Consortium meeting made up of representatives from various non-profit organizations in the state of Georgia and other states. Because of the various situational scenarios, I had to adapt the things that I said to fit various contexts. I learned to adjust my communication style to fit my audience. When I am dealing with an emotionally charged situation such as an irate parent, I've learned to first validate the person's feelings and not impose my own opinions into the conversation. I've learned that simple non-verbal actions such as nodding my head and gesturing in agreement can assure the parent or student that I am listening. I learned to speak in different registers and change my vocabulary to fit the situation. I've also learned to vary the tone in my voice and to be cognizant that both my verbal and non-verbal communications are appropriate for the situation. As a leader in my field and place of employment, I have become a skilled communicator. Being a skilled communicative leader required me to learn how to adapt my communication style based on the circumstance that I'm in whether it is on an organizational level, in various social or professional groups, or even on a global scale.

There can be many moving parts in accomplishing a common goal. Having a collaborative workplace that shares and contributes to the common goal requires an effective communicative leader that is transparent in their communication. I have learned that I must be transparent in my communication because transparency builds trust. As a manager of processes in the student loan unit, it is essential that procedures are effective and consistent and disbursements are made in a timely manner, as many of our students and families rely completely on this aid for more than just tuition, but for living expenses as well. When faced with roadblocks, system breakdowns, and other dilemmas, communicating challenges and working together to find solutions require that I keep lines of communication open by actively listening to what others are saying. By doing so, my team members can trust that their words, suggestions and opinions are important and that they are a valued part of the organization. Having clear, open, and transparent communication gives team members the information that they need to understand what is going on and what is always needed.

I have scheduled bi-weekly "touch base" meetings to discuss the inner workings of what's going on in the office, discuss how to resolve small imperfections before kinks become significant problems, and to follow-up on concerns that are raised. These short meetings also allow time to celebrate small triumphs. A skilled communicative leader practices and encourages transparent communication.

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Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 4 , Title: Communication In Leadership

Continued

Communication can be one of an organization's biggest asset and can also be one of the toughest issues that an organization is faced with. When done effectively and consistently, I've learned that communication can positively impact change especially during a time of organizational changes and changes to daily operations. Effective communication can not only influence policy outcomes and raise awareness, it can motivate people to act. However, poor communication can lead to frustration and mistrust. I have learned that I cannot over-communicate when I am asking my unit to consider making organizational or operational changes. As a loan manager, I communicate consistently, frequently, and through multiple channels such as group training sessions, one-one-one meetings, emails, Zoom conferencing, and bulletin boards. It is important for everyone to know and understand, if and how, changes will impact their area of responsibility. One example of operational changes that I implemented recently was to streamline our year-end reconciliation process for federal student loans. To get everyone on board for this major operational change, required me to clearly communicate my vision and objectives and the need for this change. It also required me to listen to concerns and consider all feedback.

Communication plays a fundamental role in all facets of life. As a leader, effective communication becomes even more significant because it has the power to build and maintain relationships. Transparency is important when communicating both internally and externally. I've learned that transparency builds trust. I've learned to adapt my communication style based on my audience. Lastly, I've learned that effective communication has the power to affect change and empower people to act.

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 1 , Title: Intercultural Communication

What did you learn about this competency? Provide a 750 to 1,000-word self-assessment of your learning, i.e., write an argument to support of your claim about what you learned. Be sure to provide specific examples and reasoning to support your claim about what you learned and how you applied what you learned. Do not just tell us what you *did*; tell us what you *learned* and how you applied it.

As a financial aid advisor at an organization that reaches students, faculty and staff from many social and cultural groups around the world, my daily interaction has been enlightening, rewarding, and yet complex at times. I have learned that to build relationships with people from other cultures, it is essential to communicate effectively both verbally and nonverbally. Therefore, to develop these essential skills it was important for me to understand the way other people from cross-cultural backgrounds interconnect, understand, and make decisions. I have learned that good intercultural communication skills require me to develop a willingness to familiarize myself with those differences, accept, and adapt to them. I've also learned that with an open mind and self-reflection, we all can become more aware of our own biases and cultural assumptions when communicating with others who are unlike ourselves.

I had a very rewarding job as a financial aid advisor working with students and families from many parts of this country and from all around the world. Knowing that I had a small part in a student being able to fulfill their dream of obtaining a college degree and therefore, positively impacting the rest of their lives, is awe-inspiring. Requesting personal financial data, often digging deep into a family's dynamics, explaining to families, who were often disappointed in the awards they received and in a manner that they could understand how decisions were made based on federal and institutional methodologies, were positions that required me to develop relationships in different ways and on different levels. To achieve this, I learned that effective communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is key. Many times, students and their families visited the office to ask questions either in advance of receiving their financial aid awards, or after they have received their awards for the new year. Often, the parents were "recent" immigrants (now permanent residents of the United States) from countries such as China, South Korea, India, Brazil, one of the Latin American countries, Nigeria and Ethiopia, and many other countries. I learned, early on, that in order to build trust and maintain open lines of communications with these families, I had to first practice tolerance and patience in the way they communicated with me. Some of these families were from cultures where the men do most of the talking when they are among mixed company. I have found myself asking the mother or female student questions and the father would respond. I have encountered many situations where the younger people (our students) were not expected to speak and answer questions when their parents were present. Because we encourage students to comprehend and navigate the financial aid process themselves, have their own voice, and become independent thinkers, scenarios where the students could not speak while in the presence of their parents, required much patience and understanding. I often followed up with a phone call or email directly to the student to ensure that they understood the process. I've learned that I may not understand certain behaviors, but I must accept where it is coming from. Part of this acceptance is to accept that there are unwritten rules about social hierarchy in every culture and that it is important for me to respect that.

In my position and my own cultural background, I have learned to familiarize myself with the differences in which our families, students and even staff and faculty communicate based on their social and cultural backgrounds. One of the foremost important rules that I learned is that of touching and respect for personal space. After a long advising session with a family or student, it was natural for me, in some cases, to give that person a hug or a handshake to let them know that I care. I have learned that some cultures are not as willing to openly display that same type of affection. Some cultures simply require more personal space than my culture or others. To prevent these occurrences from happening, I've learned to be an active listener and to also watch for non-verbal cues. If I've missed a cue and my gesture is not reciprocated, I have learned not to be offended, but to accept the difference in culture. Additionally, if I have offended someone, I have asked those to be patient with me. I've learned that,

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Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 1 , Title Intercultural Communication **Continued**

although many behaviors are universal, what I have grown to accept as normal human behavior, truly is often just cultural.

I've learned that savvy intercultural communicating is vitally important to working in an organization that prides itself on increasing globalization. To effectively communicate with various social and culture groups on campus, I've learned to recognize my own personal biases, beliefs and cultural assumptions. I've learned that it is important for me to learn more about myself, my perspectives, and my worldview. I've learned that unconscious biases can hide inside of all of us, influencing our decisions and daily interactions with our students, faculty, and staff. To expose my own biases and educate myself on different cultures and social groups, I increased my reading and experiences with others of different cultures. I consciously tried to spend more time with those who did not look like me in terms of nationality, race, sexual orientation, faith and gender. For example, my office and this campus have an increasingly large Asian population. By spending time, with coworkers in this demographic, such as in the breakroom during lunchbreaks, or inviting others to join office walking groups, I have gained a greater sensitivity towards cultural stereotypes that affected and interfered with my own intercultural communication. Once I was able to recognize how culture influence me, I was in the position to see how culture influence others as well. My intercultural communication was positively impacted as a result.

I've learned a great deal about communicating with people from various cultural and social groups. We often take for granted how we communicate with one another—interpret things, create assumptions, and form decisions based on our own cultural upbringing. I have learned how differently people communicate around the world based on their own values and beliefs. I've learned the importance of educating myself about other cultures and actively listening so that I gain a better understanding of the way other cultures comprehend, communicate and make decisions. To achieve this, I've learned to be open-minded and tolerant of verbal and nonverbal communication that may be different from my own.

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 3 , Title: Grant Writing

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The grant writing process required me to think broadly and unconventionally. I developed diverse streams of support and submitted several applications in an effort to build positive relationships with various granting committees. My persistence proved to be fruitful, which meant that my department had the resources to achieve its goals. However, there were many important lessons learned from the experience I had with writing the grant proposal that was ultimately awarded for \$86,000 in 2004 (an approximate \$117,232 today using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics). The focus of the grant was to educate students on managing (and possibly avoid over-borrowing) student loan debt at Emory University. With the national student debt exceeding \$1.2 trillion dollars at the time (today it exceeds \$1.5 trillion), I knew that I had to do more for Emory students than what was currently being offered. Before beginning the writing process, I learned the importance of strictly following the Request for Proposal (RFP) guidelines. I learned how to respond effectively to negative feedback from those assigned to review my proposals. I learned that for the grant to be impactful to my organization, I had to ensure that it was clearly definable and relevant to my organization's mission and goals. Equally important, I learned to develop strategies for long-term sustainable and operational structures with a decrease dependence on the grant.

Strictly following the guidelines of the RFP boosted my application's odds for success. An RFP gives detailed information that the applicant needs to know, such as the application guidelines, the deadlines, required attachments, timeline to respond to any follow-up questions, and more. I have learned that following the RFP guidelines reduces the need for extensive structural adjustments to the proposal. I had the passion, the great ideas, and the detailed RFP. However, in my over-zealous attempt to persuade the reviewers that my cause was one of great merit, I provided a lot of student loan indebtedness and student loan default data into my proposal—more data than what was either necessary or requested. After much time and labor, I realized that successful grant writing must first start with a thorough understanding of the requirements and a good business plan that marries my innovative ideas. By following the RFP guidelines with clear and concise language and data, the business plan progressed. I was able forecast expenditures that included short and long-term costs, prove that my plan had a quantifiable threshold of success, and outlined what the impact would be on the Emory community. Successful grant-writing outcomes require thoughtful planning and strict attention to the request of information. This process allowed me to acquire even greater insights into the needs of other areas of my department. Having this insight, proved to be beneficial in streamlining departmental processes and procedures.

In spite of my efforts to address all points outlined in the RFP, many times throughout, I was required to make changes, provide additional information or clarification to the reviewers. This process, in itself, required much self-discipline, strategic planning, and thoughtful responses. When significant changes to content and scope was required, I had to make thoughtful and strategic decisions whether resubmitting the proposal or providing an entirely new submission made sense. Often, rewording large sections of the application, deleting large sections of the approach but still maintaining the initial intent, and reducing room for assumptions provided the clarity needed for the reviewers to move forward. For example, I made assumptions that some wording and phrases were common knowledge. The financial aid industry is full of acronyms such as FAFSA (Free Application for Student Aid), EFC (Expected Family Contribution), FFEL (Federal Family Education Loan), COA (Cost of Attendance), BRR (Borrower's Rights and Responsibilities), CDR (Cohort Default Rate), DRAP (Default Reduction Assistance Program), TIV (Title IV of the higher Education Act), and more. I have learned to remove all of my emotional

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Competency # 3 , Title: Grant Writing

Continued

reactions and discuss with the program officer what the principal concerns were if substantial revisions were requested. To organize my time, I placed the list of changes into two categories: Those requiring low effort and those requiring greater effort on my part. After making the changes, I resubmitted the proposal and acknowledged the reviewers comments and thanked them for their constructive comments and detailed review of my proposal. I learned that it was my responsibility as a grant-writer to make the reviewer's job as easy as I possibly could and responding appropriately demonstrates how thoughtful and responsive I am.

Grant writing requires careful consideration of my organization's missions and goals. I learned that my department's missions must guide the process of this proposal. I realized that unless I got buy-in from administrators in my organization, my efforts would be much more difficult, if not fruitless. To get buy-in, or at least some level of support from colleagues and top administrators, I had to demonstrate that the goals for the program would be far-reaching across campus. My department's mission of, "...administering programs with integrity and equity," meant that I had to think broadly—How can these initiatives positively impact all (or at least most) students on campus—not just those who had loan debt? After thoughtfully editing my ideas to ensure that I could establish success markers that supported our missions, I solicited letters of support from colleague and other administrators at my place of employment. I learned that remaining true to department's mission and goals, helped to drive the vision and objectives that I had for the funding.

I learned to that it is important to have a viable plan for keeping the financial literacy program going once the grant period was over. Sustainability planning was an important element of the grant proposal. Not only did most grant applications ask for that information, but I grew to understand that having this in place prepared the program for success beyond the funding period. Although my projections included both financial and operational costs for the three-year grant period, initially, I did not consider how the program would sustain on its own after the period ended. Subsequently, I provided a long-term vision for my initiatives that would guide my sustainability efforts. This included demonstrating the immediate and long-term program benefits to our students and department, the number students this program would reach over time, and provided the amount of resources it would require in the long-term. Because of the sustainability planning during the writing process, positive impact over the short term of the grant period, and upfront buy-in from colleagues and administrators, resources were available to pursue long-term debt management and financial literacy programming. I have learned that projecting the long-term future of my initiatives with decrease dependence on the grant funds is essential to sustaining the programs that I create.

Grant writing is a full commitment of time, hard work, clear vision, and effort with no guarantee of approval. The writing process for the 2004 grant funding, exceeded a year before I submitted it to reviewers. I have learned to be open to criticism and to strategize for the program's future sustainability. The outcome of this process had a lasting impact on my department and the Emory community. Our university's minimal cohort default rate is one many positive outcomes from this grant. Yet, the project represented just the beginning of a new phase of growth for my department. The Peer Financial Counseling Program, Financial Literacy newsletter and many other on-campus programming has far outlasted the funding period of the grant. It attracted increased attention to areas that did not receive adequate attention. Financial literacy and debt management education is thriving on Emory's campus today.

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 4 , Title: Communication in Leadership

What did you learn about this competency? Provide a 750 to 1,000-word self-assessment of your learning, i.e., write an argument to support of your claim about what you learned. Be sure to provide specific examples and reasoning to support your claim about what you learned and how you applied what you learned. Do not just tell us what you *did*; tell us what you *learned* and how you applied it.

Effective communication is essential to establishing strong relationships. It is the most important skill a manager must have to ensure that they are able to motivate and inspire others to work hard and achieve targeted goals within their unit and organization. As the co-manager of the student loan unit, I have learned through improved self-awareness and improved relationship management skills how to lead successfully through effective communication. I have learned that productive communication requires me to understand who the receivers are of my communication efforts so that my message is relatable and persuasive. I have learned to build trust by communicating and demonstrating ethos whether it's in my daily interactions with my unit, a large university-wide seminar, or other external customers. I've learned that effective communication and effective leadership are intertwined and is a recipe for achieving growth and success in the workplace.

Daily, I am placed in different positions where my communication skills are tested. Through improved self-awareness and self-management skills, I have learned to understand my own emotions and tendencies during challenging situations that create strong emotions. I've learned to manage my emotional reactions during my interaction with various personnel. As the co-manager of a large student loan process and debt management coordinator for the university, effective communication is essential in the timely processing and disbursing of funds. It is an equally demanding process ensuring that the university's cohort default rates remain minimal. I have developed strategies for effectively communicating the needs of the department by providing training and mentoring opportunities to all those impacted and associated with the loan processes. By sharing essential strategies, information and techniques with other staff members, including other leadership team members. I have developed a culture of trust. I solicit and encourage positive conversations and constructive feedback as a way to improve workplace environment. I have learned to place emphasis on listening patiently and not just speaking. I have learned to prevent my emotions from ruling my behavior in all situations which has allowed me to become a more effective communicative leader. For better results with my team, I take time to accept the challenges in front of me and research and diagnose problems before offering suggestions or imposing changes. Because of my improved self-awareness and self-management skills, I have learned how to take control of difficult situations. By doing so, I lead positive and productive conversations.

I learned to adjust my communication style to fit my audience and situation. Knowing who is on the receiving end of my communication efforts, allows me to connect with them and understand the perspective that they bring to the space. Working in an environment where my daily interactions are with individuals of all cultural backgrounds who range from Generation Z to Baby Boomers, students to faculty, and other external partners, requires that I understand and apply communication styles that are effective, persuasive, and encouraging in every environment. I keep in mind the ability and comprehension of the receiver to ensure that they will be able to grasp the meaning and spirit of the information that is being passed on to them. Just as important as having a diverse leadership style that is based on the situation, my communication style is equally diverse and is tailored to the demand of the receiver.

There are simple practices that I've applied and incorporated into my daily communication whether it's in a group or while communicating with an individual. I've learned that validating a person's feelings and not imposing my own opinions into a conversation demonstrates respect for that individual. Respect builds trust. I've ensured that simple non-verbal actions, signals, postures and gestures, such as nodding my head in agreement, can assure my team members, parents or students that I am attentively listening. I learned to speak in different registers and change my vocabulary to fit the situation. I've also learned to vary the tone in my voice and to be cognizant that both my verbal

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 4 , Title: Communication in Leadership

Continued

and non-verbal communications are appropriate for the situation. Being a skilled communicative leader requires me to learn how to adapt my communication style based on the circumstance that I am in, whether it is with my team members, on an organizational level, in various social or professional groups, or environments that are on a global scale.

Ethos is an important factor in effective communication. I have learned that to get buy-in from members on my team, my department's leadership, families, and other audiences, it is necessary that I establish credibility and relatability to achieve trust. What I have learned is that to accomplish this, I must continue educating myself (building my reputation) in all areas of responsibilities—streamlining processes, innovating, being an authority on rules and regulations. I have learned that my formal role as Assistant Director overseeing loan processes and debt management allows certain decision-making power. However, what has made me a more persuasive communicator in my leadership position is the informal power that I've earned by creating financial literacy best practices for students, researching and analyzing untapped data to form profiles of potential defaulters, creating "office hours" in spaces in various areas on campus where students can obtain one-on-one debt management and financial literacy advising. I have scheduled bi-weekly "touch base" meetings to discuss the inner workings of what's going on in the office, discuss how to resolve small imperfections before kinks become significant problems, and to follow-up on concerns that are raised. These short meetings also allow time to celebrate small triumphs.

Open communication with my team has ensured that procedures are effective and consistent. Additionally, it ensures that disbursements are made in a timely manner because many of our students and families rely completely on this aid for more than just tuition, but for living expenses as well. When faced with roadblocks, system breakdowns, and other dilemmas, communicating challenges and working together to find solutions require that I keep lines of communication open by actively listening to what others are saying. By doing so, my team members trust that I have the knowledge and authority to bring these problems to a resolution. Additionally, they can trust that their words, suggestions, and opinions are important and that they are a valued part of the organization.

Communication can be one of an organization's biggest asset and can be one of the toughest issues that an organization faces. Effective leadership requires that effective communication is in place. I've learned that communication can positively impact change especially during times of organizational changes and changes to daily operations. Effective communication can not only influence policy outcomes and raise awareness, it can motivate people to act. I have learned that to improve my communication skills I had to improve my self-awareness and self-management skills. I have learned to be mindful of who is on the receiving end of my communication so that my efforts are relatable and impactful. Additionally, I have gained the necessary skills and knowledge to build trust (through transparency) with my team and audiences. As a leader, effective communication becomes even more significant because it has the power to build and maintain relationships.

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 1 , Title: Intercultural Communication

What did you learn about this competency? Provide a 750 to 1,000-word self-assessment of your learning, i.e., write an argument to support of your claim about what you learned. Be sure to provide specific examples and reasoning to support your claim about what you learned and how you applied what you learned. Do not just tell us what you *did*; tell us what you *learned* and how you applied it.

Globalization has made intercultural communication an unescapable and essential aspect of my job. As a financial aid advisor at an organization that reaches students, faculty and staff from many social and cultural groups from around the world, my daily interaction has been enlightening, rewarding, and yet complex at times. With the advancement in technology, especially the internet (and now video conferencing communication tools such as Skype and Zoom), the world and its different cultures is within arms-reach every day of my life. Effective intercultural communication is essential whether it is interacting with others in-person, over the phone, or over the internet. I have learned that effectively and appropriately communicating in intercultural situations is important to developing cultural competence. I have learned to engage with people, verbally and non-verbally from many cultures, so that I form relationships to achieve common goals. Equally as important, I have learned that building rapport is the key to developing and maintaining successful relationships.

Effective intercultural communication is vitally important to working in an organization that prides itself on increasing globalization. To effectively communicate with various social and culture groups on campus, I have learned to recognize my own personal biases, beliefs and cultural assumptions. Cultural competence has enabled me to develop positive attitudes towards different cultures. I have learned that it is important for me to learn more about my perspectives and my worldview. I have learned to recognize the unconscious biases that have been hidden inside me, which has influenced my decisions and daily interactions with our students, faculty, and staff. To expose my own biases and educate myself on different cultures and social groups, I increased my reading and experiences with others of different backgrounds and beliefs. I consciously made efforts to spend more time with those who did not look like me in terms of nationality, race, sexual orientation, faith and gender. For example, my office and the university campus has an increasingly large Asian population. By spending time with coworkers and students within this demographic, such as in the breakroom during lunchbreaks, or inviting others to join office walking groups, I have gained a greater sensitivity towards cultural stereotypes that affected and interfered with my own intercultural communication. Talking about different cultures, customs, and views as well as stereotypes and misinformation between cultures allowed me to establish connections with people from diverse backgrounds. I was able to recognize how culture influence me, how culture influence others, and gained mutual understanding and respect for those with whom I interact.

Many times, students and their families visited the office to ask questions, in advance of receiving their financial aid awards, or after they have received their awards for the new academic year. Often, the parents were "recent" immigrants (or permanent residents of the United States) from countries such as China, South Korea, India, Brazil, one of the Latin American countries, Nigeria and Ethiopia, and many other countries. I learned, early on, that in order to build trust and maintain open lines of communications with these families, I had to first practice tolerance and patience in the way they communicated with me. Some of these families were from cultures where the men do most of the talking when they are among mixed company. I have found myself asking the mother or female student questions and the father would respond. I have encountered many situations where our students were discouraged from speaking or answering questions in the presence of their parents. Because we encourage students to comprehend and navigate the financial aid process themselves, have their own voice, and become independent thinkers, scenarios where the students could not speak while in the presence of their parents, required much patience and understanding. I often followed up with a phone call or email directly to the student to ensure that they understood the process. I have learned that I may not understand certain behaviors, but I must accept the place where

Tab IV—Work Experience

Competency # 1 , Title Intercultural Communication **Continued**

it is coming from. Part of this acceptance is to accept that there are unwritten rules about social hierarchy in every culture and that it is important for me to respect that.

I have learned to familiarize myself with the differences in which our families, students, and even staff and faculty communicate based on their social and cultural backgrounds. One of the foremost important rules that I learned is that of touching and respect for personal space. Some cultures are not willing to display affection in public. Their cultures simply require more personal space than my culture or others. I have learned to be an active listener and to watch for non-verbal cues. If I missed a cue and my gesture is not reciprocated, I have learned not to be offended, but to accept the difference in culture. On the other hand, if I have offended someone, I have asked those to be patient with me. I have learned that although many behaviors are universal, those that I have grown to accept as normal, is often cultural.

Working with students and families from many parts of this country and from all around the world is a rewarding job. Requesting personal financial data, digging into a family's dynamics and structure, explaining to families why they received the aid that they did (and in a manner that they could understand how decisions were made based on federal and institutional methodologies), required that I develop relationships with these families in different ways and on different levels. To achieve this, and because of my own Latin American background and experiences, in addition to being a first-generation college student myself, I took on the role of communicating pertinent information to families with communication barriers to ensure messaging did not get lost in translation. I found that in some communities, there is often a distrust in how data is analyzed and applied by university administrators. Some families believe that there is some hidden agenda to processes and outcomes. They often have little confidence that officials reviewing the data will act in the best interest of the families, particularly those with the greatest need. I have learned that to improve the level of trust needed to build confidence between the financial aid administrators and these groups, required room for effective dialogue. Scheduling one-on-one sessions with these families to discuss their concerns in a mutually beneficial environment allowed me to break the walls down of distrust and clear up misunderstandings and miscommunication. By building rapport, I was able to influence the behaviors and improve the efficiency and accuracy of the data received. I learned that there is a significant and negative impact that low trust can have on the diversification efforts of the university. Effective intercultural communication is key to establishing rapport and creating successful relationships in every cultural groups.

Building relationships with people from different cultures and social groups is key to building a diverse community and achieving a common goal. Achieving cultural competence allowed me to acquire new perspectives, ideas and strategies in the workplace (and my personal life). I often took for granted how I communicated with others—interpreted things, created assumptions, and formed decisions based on my own cultural upbringing. I have learned to develop essential skills to understand the way other people from cross-cultural backgrounds interconnect, understand and make decisions. I have learned that intercultural communication skills requires that I develop a willingness to familiarize myself with those differences, accept, and adapt to them. To do this, I learned to be open-minded and self-reflective so I can become more aware of my own biases and cultural assumptions.