

Scholars Preparing to Join Workforce

Avenue Scholars (AS) has a clear mission. That mission is to ensure careers for committed students of hope and need through education/training and supportive relationships. Furthermore, AS aspires for each student it serves to complete our program having satisfied the following guarantees: education/training, work experience, work-ready skills, attendance, and financial and personal wellbeing.

We define work ready habits and skills in a committed Avenue Scholar as an ability to demonstrate responsibility, work ethic, communication, positive attitude, professionalism, teamwork and problem solving. Sometimes, these skills are called 'soft' skills in the workplace, in contrast to the 'hard' skills of experience, education, and training.

Why is it important to be able to demonstrate this readiness for work? Employers have long touted the importance of soft skill development in hiring. According to P. Loretto (2019) at balancecareers.com, "Employers value these types of skills because they demonstrate the internal thought processes of a person and how effective they will be in the organization." In fact, according to J. Bauer-Wolf (2019), writing for inside-highered.com, "...employers emphasized leadership and ability to work in a team as the most desirable attributes when recruiting ... ahead of analytical and quantitative skills."

High school is a perfect place to develop and hone these work ready skills. The Nebraska Department of Education created the Nebraska's Standards of Career Readiness (adopted in 2011), available online at this site, which guide our work with students. <https://www.education.ne.gov/nce/careerreadinessstandards/>.

The Avenue Scholars program builds work-ready skill development into its curriculum and activities from day one. One example is the use of a text, called *Bring Your A Game to Work*, by E. Chester (2012). It involves activities and discussions around developing a work ethic that focus on attitude, attendance, appearance, ambition, accountability, acceptance, and appreciation. Our curriculum engages students in problem solving and critical thinking about appropriate work behaviors, coaches students on employability, and monitors and supports growth in transferable job skills. The first measure of demonstration of developing work ready skills is completion of the Avenue Scholars' career ready curriculum.

The second measure used to monitor and support growth in students' work ready skill development is through the experience of part-time work and employer feedback. All Avenue Scholars complete part-time work during their junior and senior years, a perfect training ground for practicing those work ready skills. To build a successful work history, Avenue Scholars' coaches assist students in finding those part-time jobs, monitor work hours, complete employee feedback forms, and facilitate student self-evaluation and progress evaluations. Students are expected to meet or exceed standards on the employer feedback form.

The Employee Feedback Form that we use in the program represents what employers value in work ready skills. Employers rate students in a variety of categories as proficient, progressing or not progressing. In the area of responsibility and work ethic, we look at reliability and dependability. Communication includes both oral and written communication and timeliness. Positive attitude is

reflected as respect for others, confidence, and environmental awareness. Professionalism is measured as carrying oneself with confidence in one's behaviors and attitudes. Teamwork looks at working collaboratively with others. Problem solving includes decision-making, adaptability, initiative, and conflict resolution. Coaches then support

the student in the application of strengths and development of weaknesses in these areas.

We know that employers strive to find workers with valuable work readiness skills. They believe those skills are likely to influence retention and satisfaction on the job. According to B. Bean-Mellinger (2019) at smallbusiness-chron.com, "Candidates with workplace skills are employable because they make sound decisions, have the capacity to acquire new knowledge and easily adapt to various work situations."

What can parents do to help their students? The development of work-ready skills are mirrored in the behaviors and attitudes you expect of your teens at home. Help your student with etiquette and manners. Practice listening and having conversations face to face. Review their digital footprint and social media accounts. Practice time management and goal setting. Expect responsibility and dependability of your teen in everyday life. Any practice at home will help to hone the skills that will benefit a teen for a lifetime.



Avenue Scholars students are given opportunities to explore jobs in various career fields, such as automotive technology.



Outstanding Senior Scholar
Velez-Jimenez maintains upbeat energy

While battling the blues of dealing with the Coronavirus, classmates and teachers at Omaha South High School can count on senior Diego Velez-Jimenez to provide some positive vibes in the hallways and classrooms.

“Diego has a very upbeat energy and has positive relationships with his peers and teachers,” High School Career Coach Alejandra Soto-Suarez says. “He participates and is engaged in class.”

Velez-Jimenez stays busy

with a part-time job and family responsibilities.

“He is a very busy senior who works on the evenings and weekends, and cares for his younger siblings while they are all home doing remote learning during school hours,” Soto-Suarez said.



Velez-Jimenez enjoys being in Avenue Scholars and is looking forward to obtaining his degree in Automotive Technology at Metropolitan Community College in the future.

Outstanding Junior Scholar
Dominguez-Ruiz ‘eager participant’

Junior Crystal Dominguez-Ruiz takes pride in punctuality while becoming engaged in the Avenue Scholars program.

“Crystal appreciates being part of the program and finds it very helpful,” High School Career Coach Alejandra Soto-Suarez said. “Crystal has been an eager and active participant in Avenue Scholars since early June when I started doing weekly meetings to get to know the students.”



According to Soto, Dominguez-Ruiz has never missed a meeting and is always the first one to login.

“She has a positivity and energy that enlighten the atmosphere,” Soto said. “I know that I can call on Crystal to contribute and participate and that Crystal will never disappoint.”

Crystal is a good self-advocate and has reached out to use the resources available at Avenue Scholars to help her balance life and be successful.”

UPDATE

Here we are, starting the school year in a pandemic and doing the best we can to accomplish all of our program objectives despite the obstacles. It has not been ideal, and it has definitely been a bumpy road thus far. We are adapting and making the best of our situation.



My students are taking advantage of the resources available to them and participating in as many events as possible — either virtual or in-person. Right now, the building is buzzing with the return of students in person. Signs, arrows, and extra bottles of sanitizer are part of the new normal as all the precautions have been taken for a safe return.

The juniors are excited and eager; there is a certain energy about them. Most of them have been virtually meeting with their High School coach through the summer. Some have requested one-on-one sessions to work on their resume ahead of their class because they are ready to go looking for a job. They are zealous to get going, to learn the skills they know they need to learn, to apply for jobs, to partake in events and to explore their career pathways.

The seniors, while feeling a little anxious of how their senior year of high school will finish during the pandemic, remain motivated and stay the course. They completed their ACT on Sept. 22, and are already mentally preparing for what Senior Academy will look like this year. They have signed up for opportunities as they become available, such as the CNA certification offered at Fulton Homes in October.

While students had a choice to either remain virtual or return in person, most Scholars chose to return in person, and Mrs. Soto is eager to welcome them and have better opportunities to know and interact with this amazing group of students.

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