

- 1 Name: Michelle Simmons
2. Title: Project Manager, 757 Regional Internship Collaborative
3. Institution: Old Dominion University
4. Role: Region 5 Coordinator

5. Please provide the name, date and location of the conference attended.

Southern Association of Colleges and Employers (SoACE) Conference, December 3 – 6th, 2023, New Orleans, Louisiana

6. Provide a brief overview of the membership or conference opportunity and why you selected it—why is this opportunity critical to your current work and career goals to advance work-based learning opportunities for students? (This should be a summary/story of need).

I applied to the SCHEV Professional Development Scholarship because of my limited exposure to higher education conferences. SoACE is a professional association dedicated to fostering connectivity among employers, institutions, and students by extending opportunities for professional and career development, and networking. I opted to attend the SoACE conference to learn how colleges were promoting career services, experiential learning, and employer engagement on their campuses. Several colleagues in my region spoken highly of the benefits derived from their SoACE membership and conference attendance and I was eager to personally gain that experience. The opportunity to attend was pertinent to my current work because the mission of the association aligned with my role as a VTOP Project Manager to help expand work-based learning opportunities. I am motivated by helping others navigate next steps on their career development journey.

7. What did you learn from the professional development opportunity and how does it relate to advancing work-based learning for students? What sets this opportunity (conference or membership) apart? Be specific. (This should be a summary/story of the value that this scholarship added to your professional work).

The conference was an opportunity to learn from practitioners in higher education. I attended to understand lessons career services personnel obtained from their interactions with students and employers. Notable presentation topics included funding internships, supporting the next generation of freelancers/entrepreneurial essentials, coordinating job shadowing experiences, and collaborations between faculty and institutional career centers. Additionally, I learned about using Chat GPT as a tool to enhance student career advising sessions.

8. How do you plan on using what you learned in your day-to-day responsibilities and current role?

A highlight for me was the Black Career Services Professional Summit: Leadership Tips for African American Professionals in Higher Education. The presenters encouraged attendees

to openly share their experiences as individuals of color in their respective workspaces. Conversation areas included career goals and mentorship, which fostered a genuine and supportive environment. I thoroughly enjoyed the session and the thought-provoking questions rendered by the presenters. I appreciated the additional time for professional and amicable engagement.

9. How will this opportunity benefit the students you work with?

My day-to-day professional endeavors necessitate advancing the goals of the VTOP grant in my region. The emphasis is to help facilitate connections among institutions, employers, and students to increase the availability of work-based learning opportunities. Attending the conference has inspired me to strengthen collaborative efforts with institutions. I hope to accomplish this by sustained, active engagement with 757 Regional Internship Collaborative members and elevating the visibility of our initiatives across the region.

10. What else would you like to share about the conference/membership experience?

N/A