

THE MACKLIN BUSINESS INSTITUTE AND CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP at Montgomery College



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The Making of an MBI Team

This September is the beginning of an exciting journey for a new group of Macklin Business Institute scholars—the class of 2008. The culturally diverse group, six women and eight men, faced their first challenge assigned by the Macklin Business Institute before the official start of the semester.

Gathering together on a Tuesday morning, the 14 new Macklin Business Institute (MBI) scholars were visibly anxious. More than pre-semester jitters, these new recruits were not sure they were prepared for their first extra-curricular activity—a ropes course. Although unsure what would lie ahead, they arrived on time dressed for an outdoor adventure.

Having been accepted into the highly selective sophomore-year business scholars program at Montgomery College, the students had proven themselves individually already; the ropes course would challenge them to work as a team—a skill they will need throughout the Macklin program.

Operated by Project Ascent, LLC, in Adamstown, Md., the ropes course uses exercises and games to strengthen team-building, with specific activities that focus on ice breaking, communication, trust, and problem solving. A follow-up discussion concludes each portion.

Meeting with the new arrivals, Project Ascent Director Avi Gross encouraged the group to proceed mindfully: "These activities are about trust and building relation-

ships ... It's a challenge-by-choice philosophy—it's your responsibility to choose how much you are willing to challenge yourself."

With trepidation, the MBI scholars proceeded to their first activity: "Ninja Names." As they stood in a circle, each performed a ninja move while saying their name. "I feel so stupid," said scholar Mariyah Zamaray. "We all feel stupid. Don't worry, just do it," reassured Professor Linda Youngentob.

Before long, the scholars and MBI staff began to chuckle uncontrollably. The ice was broken, and the group interacted effortlessly with each other.

Following each activity, Gross invited comments and pointed out examples of how the group dynamic was replacing their individual mindsets: "You are starting to build on what you know about each other... You learned from your mistakes and adapted resources."

As the day wore on, the challenges increased.

One activity required the students to jump a 10-foot wall with the help of their team-

mates. As each scholar jumped and succeeded, the task seemed progressively easier for the next in line. But when scholar Ayesha Qadeer failed to successfully make the jump and tumbled to the ground, everyone was shaken.

Now invested as a team, the scholars re-evaluated the situation. "We should take our time, be more patient," said scholar Arjun Achreja. After a short break, Qadeer decided to make another attempt, and nailed it. Her team was impressed:

"When Ayesha came back... that was amazing...most people wouldn't have," said scholar Kumbi Mahari.

"Ayesha getting up again was brave...I wouldn't have," said scholar Nick Sergon.

"It's good to have people that will try it again," said Cook.

While they agreed the 10-foot wall wasn't the most challenging of all the activities



that day in terms of fear factor, it was a defining moment for all of them. They recognized a transformation in their collective concern when one member of the group was down, and a sense of accomplishment when they all succeeded.

At day's end, the group's energy level had shifted 180 degrees. In a matter of hours, they had journeyed from strangers to team mates. MBI Director Steve Lang said, "I was very encouraged to see [them] all so close, laughing and talking to each other."

The students felt it, too. "We're ready to start taking chances...knowing that the team will pick you up if you fall," said Zamaray. "I'm lost for words," said Mahari. "Everyone as a group was amazing. I couldn't have been placed with a better group of people."

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