Economic Impact of Annual COE Conference Tops $2 Million

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In 2015, the College of Education’s (COE) annual National Youth-At-Risk (NYAR) Conference added $2.3 million in economic “output” according to a report just released by the Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development (BBRED). The conference, now in its 27th year, is Georgia Southern University’s largest and longest running conference. The economic impact was calculated for Savannah, Georgia, where the conference is held each year.

“We’ve known that the NYAR conference is an important annual event for professionals at all levels dealing with at-risk youth,” said COE Dean Thomas Koballa. “What we didn’t know is how important this conference is to the local economy, as well,” he added. The conference has been held in Savannah, Georgia, since 1989. It is Georgia Southern’s longest running national conference.

Data from the March 2015 conference was used for the report. Attendees came from 44 states and as far away as China.

According to conference co-chair, Dan Rea, “The conference is a valuable professional learning experience because it holistically trains educators to create safe, healthy, caring, and intellectually empowering educational environments for youth at risk.”

The 2015 conference drew 1,427 attendees, 196 of which were based in the Savannah area. The analysis found that $1.6 million in capital was “directly spent by visitors in the form of goods and services,” which set off another round of spending in form of business-to-business transactions of $1.43 million and individual-to-business transactions of $840,000.

Nearly 60 percent of the attendees responding to a survey said they would return to the Savannah area without the conference.

“Our goal first and foremost is to provide the best possible environment for learning and creating professional connections for those attending the National Youth-At-Risk Conference. This report shows that if you meet participants’ needs, there’s an additional payoff to the hosting city even after the conference is over,” said Koballa. “That so many of the attendees were impressed with the conference and site that they will return to visit Savannah speaks to the professionalism of all those involved with the conference,” added Koballa.

The National Youth-At-Risk Conference is organized by the National Youth-At-Risk Center at the College of Education and the Division of Continuing Education. It is one of five conferences sponsored by COE and held in Savannah. The others are: Global Education Summit; Rural HIV Research and Training Conference; Cross-Cultural Counseling and Education Conference for Research, Action and Change; and Curriculum Studies Summer Collaborative Conference.

BBRED is part of the Business Innovation Group at Georgia Southern University.