

SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

Office of Leadership Activities

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Skill Building – Orienting New Members

Introduction

Orienting new members can be seen as developing and conducting an organizational recruitment campaign. Yet, as we all know, retaining these new members is entirely another matter. All too frequently clubs skip any form of orientation and just place their new members directly on committees or projects. Although involvement is crucial to the longevity of the group, understanding the club and its goals, objectives, structure, norms and taboos is equally as important. By taking the time to orient new members, you create a more educated membership and a more productive club.

Planning an Orientation Session

A successful organization orientation program should include:

- The rights and responsibilities of members
- Club structure, operating policies and procedures
- Club history, traditions and programs
- An overview of campus services (Leadership Activities Office and SGA), activities and programs for clubs
- Information about any support groups or affiliations the group may have
- Time should be set aside for orientation; don't combine orientation with other activities within a limited time space.

AIM (Acquaint Inform Motivate)

Acquaint

The purpose of any new member orientation program is to acquaint your new members to both the club and each other. Knowing the ins-and-outs of the group is only one aspect of being in a club. It is important to remember that people join groups for many reasons: they want to get involved, learn new skills, make friends and have a good time. For this reason it is important to structure time for the members to get to know each other and to develop personal relationships and commitments. Ice-breakers are a popular tool. Leadership Activities maintains many resources and can suggest ideas – just ask!

Inform

Tell new members your clubs history, purpose and structure. If there are written records, give everyone a copy. Be sure to include charts, officer job descriptions and a membership list, complete with phone numbers. Have the new members included on this list!

If you do not have a written history, have the group write one. To do so, place newsprint on the wall and choose a scribe. Next, ask the membership to

tell what they know about the club: how the group was formed, when and where it started, what past members were like, the programs and/or services that they offered, how the club was structured and how it has evolved over the years. Go back as far as you can. When recording this information be creative and think up interesting chapter titles. Remember that SGA keeps copies of charters if you don't have yours.

It is important to remember that this is an oral history and that you are recording people's perceptions about the group. These may not be totally accurate. However, they are important perceptions. They influence how people, both members and non-members, think and feel about the group. This collective writing of your group's history also provides an opportunity for the leadership to dispel any myths and rumors that may be brought up.

Motivate

Get your members, returning and newly recruited, excited about the group. Provide time for them to meet each other to share ideas and expectations. Below is a good exercise designed to accomplish that goal. Have the group break into groups of experienced and new members to discuss the following:

- Experienced Members:
 - If you had last year to do over again would you do anything differently? If yes, how so?
 - What advice would you offer to the new members?
 - Of which accomplishment(s) are you most proud?

- New Members:
 - What would you like this club to mean to you one year from now?
 - What would you like to ask the experienced members?
 - What goals would you like to accomplish this year?
 - What problems do you anticipate and how would you solve them?

Spend at least 15 minutes in your group discussing these questions. When time is up gather together as one group and report what you discussed. It is usually most effective to have the experienced members report first, followed by the new members.

It is also very important to find out what the new members' interests are and what skills they bring to the group. Using this information, try to give them tasks that will successfully use their talents and give them a reason to be committed. Whenever possible, recognize members' accomplishments both publicly and privately.