

HOW TO PUT ON A GREAT CAMPUS PROGRAM!



Photo courtesy of Jesse Sunski - NACURH 2006 Conference

Kalyn Williams, *Associate Director - Programming*
Midwest Affiliate
September 2007



National Association of College and University Residence Halls, Inc.

HOW TO PUT ON A GREAT CAMPUS PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Every programmer on every campus is capable of putting together a great campus program. Using a simple process of planning-running-evaluation, a program can be created for any subject or group. This guide focuses mainly on programming in residence halls, though the process is the same for wider-scale programming.

ASSESS RESIDENT NEEDS

The absolute first step in running a great program is to assess the needs of the residents; a program is more effective if it covers what students *need* to see as well as what they *want* to see. Figuring out what residence hall students need can be as simple as walking down a residence hall hallway and chatting with the students you run into; conversations over college life and classes are an easy way of gaining insight into resident needs. Other ways of assessing needs require a little more work; distributing surveys in the dining center or soliciting responses through a mass e-mail are but a few examples.

Coming up with program ideas after the needs are identified is easy. For example, many college students experience high stress levels, especially around paper-writing and finals, and like to complain about the amount of stress they're under and how much work they still have to do. A programmer could recognize that the students need to learn some studying strategies and ways to relieve stress. A social/relaxation program such as a movie night is perfectly suited for this situation; however, to give the program a helpful spin, study tips and stress balls could be distributed before and after the movie.

FINDING THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Once the residents' needs and wants have been discovered, the next step of the programming process can begin: finding the target audience. A program can be aimed at a specific group, depending on what 'the point' of that program is, without being exclusive. For example, a women's self-defense seminar is designed mainly at women, but everyone is welcome.

The vast majority of on-campus programs are aimed at the on-campus residents. While this may seem like an obvious statement, it is easy to forget who the audience is when programming. Keep the audience in mind and the program will be more effective.

DECIDE ON THE TYPE OF PROGRAM

Depending on the audience and the main focus of the program, decide what type of program should be done. There are four main program types: Educational, Social, Diversity, and Fundraising. Of course, these types can be combined and twisted around to create any number of sub-types.

Educational programs are focused on distributing knowledge to the target audience. While the main point of this type of program is for the participants to walk away having learned something, they can still be fun. In fact, having an element of fun in an educational program makes it more interesting, which helps attract more participants. Also, if participants are having fun, they are more likely to stay engaged and take more away from the program. Fun can easily be added to any program. For example, instead of an alcohol awareness program where there's a slide show with a presenter lecturing for an hour, create a game using alcohol and drug awareness trivia.

Social programs are commonly seen during the beginning of the school year, and again when finals roll around (as a way for students to get rid of some stress before final exams). Their main goal is to have students in a fresh atmosphere where they are free to see friends, meet new people, and just have fun. Common examples of social programs are dances and movie nights. A word of caution: while social programs are generally easy to plan and run, they tend to cater more toward what the residents *want* rather than what they *need*.

Diversity programs help to foster community growth in the residence halls and on campus. There are innumerable diversity programming ideas available. One way to create a great diversity program is to work with another student organization that is aimed mainly at a specific group of students (though are still open for anyone to join); for instance, GLBTA. A diversity program about holidays celebrated in different cultures around the world is a great opportunity to work with other

student groups. The take-home message is that a diversity program should help students to broaden their horizons and learn about other groups and cultures.

Last but not least, there are the fundraising programs. Like the name suggests, these programs are put on to raise money to support a specific event or cause. A program that is run in many schools around the country is Relay for Life, where students and student organizations alike create teams and raise money for cancer research. However, fundraisers don't necessarily need to be large-scale programs; having a coin drive, where spare change is collected for a charity or homeless shelter attracts many students.

Each of these types of programs can be used for any number of causes or resident needs. A little brainstorming can find the right type for any program.

COME UP WITH A PLAN OF ACTION

It is after the type of program has been decided when the more physical part of programming comes in. The basic steps of physical programming are brainstorming, dividing up responsibilities, advertising, and putting on the actual program. Throughout the entire process, be sure to keep in contact with the other committee members to make sure that everything stays on track!

Most of the brainstorming part of the programming process can take place in one committee meeting. In fact, much of the planning discussed above can be decided at that meeting as well. An additional thing to consider in the first meeting includes the timing of the program. A snow-sculpting contest works much better in January than in May. The venue where the program will be held should also be decided. Some spaces require reservations and paperwork, especially if they are indoor common areas. If the program is to be outside, make sure to have an indoor back-up space in case of inclement weather!

Dividing up the programming responsibilities is a crucial part to creating a successful program. It is nearly impossible for one person to create and run an entire program by themselves. An easy way to divide up tasks is to create subcommittees of two to four people. Each subcommittee focuses on a specific part of the program, such as food (if the program requires food), venue reservation and

paperwork (space permits, etc.), and advertising (creating posters, chalking, etc.), just to name a few of the possibilities. Each subcommittee has their own deadlines to meet to make the program successful.

Food can be a welcome addition to many programs...in fact, many people will attend a program simply because there is free food involved. Consider options when purchasing food; on-campus students typically eat in a residential dining center every day, so they may be turned off by the invitation for *more* dining center food, even if it is free. Be sure to look at local restaurants and businesses; many will give a discount for large orders or for student groups. Others may offer the food at full price but include small gift certificates to be handed out as door or raffle prizes. The only way to find a good deal on food is to ask, so be prepared to make a lot of phone calls! When purchasing food, be sure to also arrange for garbage and recycling bins to be available. Leaving a space cleaner than when you entered it casts a good light on your organization and its members!

ADVERTISING

Even if extensive planning and hundreds of work hours have gone into planning a program, very few people will show up if no advertising is done. It is virtually impossible to over-advertise a program, so go crazy! A good way to make people remember your program is to come up with a logo or catchphrase which, when put on all of the advertisements, will become associated in residents' minds with the program.

If time and money are hard to come by, there are still several cheap and easy advertising methods to choose from. Posters hung up in residence hall lobbies and bathrooms are cheap and easy to create. Experiment with different color schemes to find what catches the eyes of the residents the most. Chalking is also inexpensive, but requires late-night and long-distance walking, so be sure to go in groups, and remember to only chalk on horizontal surfaces where rain can wash your ads away.

Along with the standard posters and chalking, there are an infinite number of ways to creatively advertise a program. Have committee members mention it in their classes. Walk through common areas with a large sign proclaiming the title, date, time, location, and a slogan. In recent years, mass e-mails to

all residents are becoming more popular and are an easy way to spread the word about a program to everyone. These are just a few options; there are many more!

RUNNING THE PROGRAM!

Planning and preparing for a program typically takes four to six weeks, though the time may vary considerably depending on the type and scale of the program. However, at the end of all of that work lays the program itself.

On the day of the program, the most important advice is to arrive early! Setup for any program always takes longer than anticipated. There will also be unforeseen problems; the equipment might arrive late, or a food delivery person might get lost. In any event, it is important to be prepared to handle day-of-the-program challenges. Also, keep a list of all equipment used so nothing gets misplaced or lost, as well as a check-in list for any speakers/activity leaders/bands/etc. that may be participating in your program to make sure that everyone arrives safely and on time!

When everything is set up and ready to go, your program is ready! While the program is running, enjoy it! The combined work of several people goes into a program; it's a good feeling to be able to look back on it and say 'Wow! We did that!'. This time can also be used to judge the interest level and enjoyment of the people attending the program.

When the program is finished, talk with attendees as they leave. Find out if they enjoyed the program. This information can be used when evaluating the program. Be sure to clean up the space and return/put away any equipment...the space should be cleaner when you are finished than when you started!

EVALUATION

The final part of putting on campus program is evaluation. Meet as a committee one last time soon after the program. Discuss the process used for the program; what worked? What didn't work? What can be improved for next time? Did the residents seem to get 'the point' of the program?

Even if it is not required, write a short evaluation of the program, highlighting its difficulties and how to make them better, as well as the areas that were outstanding and really let the program shine. This evaluation will come in handy for your successors, should they ever want to run a similar program.

CONCLUSION

All in all, the process for creating, running, and evaluating a great campus program requires a lot of teamwork and many hours. Nevertheless, if taken seriously, a program can attract many residents and give them both what they want and what they need. Campus programming helps students open new doors and become part of new communities. The work needed for a great program is completely worth it if even one student is a better person for the experience. Good luck and have fun!