

## **Budget Cutting: Presenting Programs Inexpensively**

by  
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You've probably gotten the call from your boss, or attended the staff meeting and gotten the word: your budget is being cut. You're likely not surprised, given everything you hear and read about the economy these days. You were probably thinking-- worrying-- about it any way.

Those of us who are eternal optimists are embracing this new economic reality as we always do-- we're taking that lemon and making lemonade. And I'm hoping to do the same thing for you.

Presenting programs inexpensively is not the same as presenting cheap programs. Cheap, after all, has the implication that the program is of lesser quality. I think you can really present some great, quality programs inexpensively. It might take more work and more time, but you're probably used to that.

### ***Interactive Programs***

Let's start with interactive programs, which are those events in which students are actually participants. There are many interactive programs you can present, so let's run down a few.

Perhaps the most famous (and most popular) is the "Open Mic." And, it is "mic," short for microphone-- not "open mike." You probably know how to do an Open Mic show. You just set up a sound system and let students perform. But let me give you two secrets to success.

First, have your students sign up in advance to perform. That way they've committed to be on stage at a specific time, and they can't back out. They will also tell all their friends to come and watch them, and that can fill the room.

Second, limit their time on stage to two songs for musicians and five minutes for spoken word performers. You will find that everyone has two good songs they can sing and play-- it's that third

song that will have you wishing they had quit while they were ahead. Same thing with poets. They've all got a couple of good poems, and for most that's all they've got so far. So help them (and the audience) by limiting their performance time.

Countless variations of the Open Mic exist. How about the current craze of "American Idol?" Couldn't you present a Campus Idol contest in a similar fashion?

### ***Student Competition***

How about Lip Sync competition, or Air Guitar shows? Throw in dancing, and have your students compete in synching to popular music videos. Or how about athletic competition? You could stage your own Olympic Style games, pick the sports you want to include, and maybe a few less-athletic and more fun games. You could even have an "Iron Man" and "Iron Woman" competition, where students could compete in lifting, pulling, etc. like they do on ESPN.

Look at the popular reality shows, and create a campus version. How about a program called "The Biggest Winner" modeled after the weight-loss and fitness show? Or steal the Dance show idea, and present "Dancing With The Faculty" by teaming a student with a faculty member. Don't you think your students would come to watch their friends in a dance competition paired with their favorite faculty member?

Residence halls are famous for innovative cooking. I used to cook a grilled cheese sandwich with a steam iron on my desk. Why not have a "cook-off," like is held for chili or barbecue, only based around the microwave? Or try this idea: "Iron Chef Dorm" where you have a contest in each hall, and the winners compete to win Iron Chef of your school. The main ingredient for each dish? Why ramen noodles, of course! You might even get your food service staff to compete against the students.

There are lots of other competitions you can hold. A Texas Hold'em tournament is a sure-fire hit. How about Rock Band/Guitar Hero contest? You can even create competition to reflect the seasons. Ever heard of Frozen Turkey Bowling? How about a pumpkin toss?

### ***Make It A Game***

Any kind of game came become an event. Pullout the board games, and have a "Game Day" in the student center. Get some old games from your childhood, and have a "Retro Game Day" with Mystery Date, Candyland, and more! Spend a little money on retro candies for prizes-- you remember candy cigarettes, wax lips, and those little wax bottles with sweet colored syrup? You can order them all online.

Create your own versions of television game shows. Can you imagine how funny it would be play the "Roommate Game" like the old "Newly Wed Game?" See how much do roommates really know about each other! Recreate the "Dating Game" and ask all those funny questions with the flirtatious answers. Do you like "Deal or No Deal?" Create your own campus version, and call it "Take It Or Leave It!"

Pull out the video projector or use the big screen television and create your own games with PowerPoint computer program. You can email me for various templates that I've collected, you can find them online, or you can create your own. I've got templates for Jeopardy!, Are You Smarter Than A Fifth Grader, Password, Who Wants To Be A Millionaire, and more. Drop me an email and I'll send them to you.

How about a "craft night?" Get out the cloth loops and make pot holders, or the popsicle sticks and make model log cabins. Or get really crafty, and present a fashion show of student designed clothing. You can even make it a competition, and give a gift card for the winner.

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## **Film and Music Festivals**

Students would love a Campus Film Contest and Festival. Today, nearly everyone can be a film maker. You don't need a video camera, because even still cameras can shoot short videos. Every Windows and Mac computer comes with editing software, too, so there is no film to buy or process. Set some basic rules, like the entire film has to be shot in 24 or 48 hours, and can't be any longer than five minutes. You can show them with your video projector at the Festival. You could even post them online at YouTube, and have students vote on a winner!

Maybe a Campus Battle of the Bands is what you need. If you have a large campus musical community, then you might have enough bands to go all day long and make it a festival! Most student bands will play for free, and if you provide the sound system and production support they will sound better than ever before!

You can host a Spa Day on your campus. While this initial concept is targeted at women, you could certainly modify it for your men students, too. You can contact your local Mary Kay dealer, or Avon, and they will send out associates to do make up and "make overs." Of course, they will likely want to sell their products.

If your campus has majors in physical therapy or sports medicine, you may be able to get students to offer chair massage as a part of spa day. Find a source for nails, and you've got most of a full Spa Experience. And you can do it in the ballroom of your student center for next-to-nothing.

## **Art Shows**

Art competitions are always popular. You can have a Dorm Window Decoration competition for Homecoming or Parents' Weekend. Or how about a Sidewalk Art Festival, where students are assigned a square of sidewalk to chalk. You could have

teams, or students against the faculty. You can add a children's' section and make it a family event.

Have a Student Art show in your student center or cafeteria. Do it like a real gallery, with framing and lighting, and hold an opening reception to make it special. You can even print up a program.

## **Free Food**

Nothing draws a crowd of students like free food, right? But food can be expensive. Here's a solution: hold a "Best Of" competition among local restaurants.

Here is an example. Choose a date, time and place, and publicize that the students will select the "Best Pizza." Call Domino's, Papa John's, Little Caesar's, Pizza Hut, all the pizza shops in town.

In order to be considered, they each to supply five (or ten, depending on your student population) pepperoni pizzas. Students will sample them all, and vote on the winner. Print up a genuine-looking award on your computer, and the winner gets to announce that they were named "Best Pizza" by the students at your campus.

You can do the same thing with the local sub shops, wing shops, etc. You get free food, and they get free advertising. And one lucky store gets voted the best!

## **A Car Show**

Host a car show on campus. You can choose an Antique Car Show, a Classic Hot Rod Show, or a combination. There is likely local car club with whom you could co-sponsor, or just do it yourself.

It may sound hard to believe, but the owners of these special cars will actually pay a fee to put their car on display. You could include a competition-- because every car owner wants to win a "Gold Medal" or "Best In

Show." If you're not familiar with the categories, you've likely got some "motorheads" on your program board or in your community to help with categories and judging.

I won't go into all the details, because you know them already from other shows and events. Reserve a parking lot or green space for your car show, create the signs to direct people there, and publicize both on and off campus. It's a great family-oriented weekend event, and a great community outreach. You will be amazed at how many people will come and look at cars!

Of course, don't forget to sell refreshments-- hot dogs, burger, soft drinks, and popcorn. You might provide some "kid activities" too, like face painting.

## **Fun Times On Campus**

These are difficult times on campus, but they can still be fun times for your students. It takes some extra effort on your part to come up with program ideas. It takes even more effort to execute the ideas. But let's face it-- you don't have many options. Budgets are being cut, and you can't just close your doors. Besides, if you continue to do a outstanding job in spite of a short budget, you just might make yourself indispensable. That just might get you through the staff layoffs, if they come around next.

If you have any questions or comments, I'd love to hear from you. Just drop me an email, and I'll get back to you.

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