

**Campus Collaboration:
Integrating the College Mission into Programming
by Del Suggs**

We all know that fun is absolutely essential on a college campus. College and university life can be very demanding, with academic deadlines, work schedules, cocurricular and civic obligations. Sometimes just finding a parking space can seem like a part-time job. Entertainment--FUN--can be vital in releasing the stress of everyday college life.

Maybe that's the reason some student activities personnel don't seem to connect with the teaching mission of their school. They may embrace the theory of cocurricular programs-- that is, programs that contribute to the educational goals of their institution. But in reality, they tend to program entertainment for entertainment's sake.

It's perhaps the most common missed opportunity on any college campus. While campus entertainment can be fun, it can also be culturally enriching, or have an educational slant. But even more important, programs can serve to reach across campus and bring students, faculty, and staff together.

You often hear those common buzz-words among the administration on campus, words like "campus community," and "experiential learning." The programming staff on your campus-- whether it's Student Activities, Student Life, Student Involvement, Student Leadership--can truly be the key to **campus collaboration** in learning.

Start at the beginning

Some connections between programming and academics are easily apparent. When you bring in lecturers and other speakers, their primary purpose is to educate. Speakers from environmental and human rights groups aren't there for fun-- they're there to teach your students about the world.

But there are other, not so obvious cocurricular uses for your programs. Reach out to the faculty on your campus. There are professors you

already know who are supportive of student activities. Meet with them and discuss how student activities can be supportive of their teaching, too.

Some departments will have an distinct connection. The music department on your campus produces graduates with great musical skills. Perhaps the students (and faculty) could benefit from a master class presented by a performer you are bringing to campus. Maybe the performer could speak to music majors about the "real world" of the music business, and help them to create a career plan to follow after graduation.

The comedians that you bring to campus also have relevant skills and experiences to share. They have appeared on stages all over the country, and they may have been featured in films and on television. Wouldn't the students in your theater or drama department love to talk with a real live successful comedy star? See if you can't set up a question and answer session with theater majors. What valuable lessons your students could learn about life in New York City or LA!

The human mind is an amazing thing, and your campus probably has a number of psychology majors trying to understand it. Wouldn't they learn from interacting with the hypnotist or mentalist you've booked on your campus?

Broader Programs

Whether or not you've been successful in your outreach to these specific academic areas, consider some of the other opportunities. Most humanities classes have a requirement for students to attend a number of cultural events during the term, such as a concert, a play, an art gallery, etc. Your humanities faculty could certainly select a number of programs from your upcoming semester's events for students to attend. Just imagine thirty or forty (or

more) students boosting your audience when an entire humanities class shows up.

Another very obvious connection is with spoken word performers. Poets practically live for poetry, and would leap at the chance to speak to an English class. That might jump-start a freshman's appreciation for poetry, and produce a future Billy Collins or Sylvia Plath.

The mass communications department on your campus may have a class in the history of the cinema. By co-sponsoring with them, you could present a film series of classic motion pictures that would serve the entire student body in addition to the film classes. Everyone should have a chance to see "Citizen Kane" or "Casablanca," not just film majors.

Even More Possibilities

If you don't already, coordinate with your campus President's office and assist with the programs on other important events such as Convocations, ML King Day Celebrations, Veterans' Day and Memorial Day events. While you probably already do programs for Black History Month, Women's History Month, and Hispanic Heritage Month, reach out and present programs with other departments which bring your campus together.

When you bring in dramatic presentations of historic figures, try to include some kind of interaction with the history department. An actress playing Harriet Beecher Stowe will truly have an enormous knowledge about the actual person. How many times will a college history major get the chance to ask questions of a "real" historic person?

Develop programs which have a strong faculty-staff and student interaction. Some campuses have a "midnight breakfast" as a study break during finals week, with professors cooking and serving students in the

**Campus Collaboration:
Integrating the College Mission into Programming
by Del Suggs**

cafeteria. How about tricycle races between faculty and students during half-time of a basketball game? Consider a faculty-student volleyball game during your Spring Fling week. These kinds of events break down the barriers between the teacher and the student, and help your student body see the faculty as “real people.”

You know your programs better than anyone else. Open your eyes, and envision how those programs can reach out to the entire campus: students, faculty, and staff. Consider the different ways that you can make your programs-- or stretch your programs-- to add an educational component to the entertainment you are already providing.

Bring the Faculty to You

Ask any graduate who spent time on the campus program board, and they will tell you how they value that experience. It's a real life learning opportunity. Why not maximize it with your campus experts-- your faculty.

Can you think of a better use of a marketing professor than teaching your promotions chair how to best advertise your programs? It would be an invaluable lesson to the student, and one more opportunity for you to reach out and show the faculty how much you contribute to the educational mission of your school.

Have a business professor come work with your program board, and help them to understand budgets. It might help you out, too, and it definitely contributes to your efforts to reach out to the entire campus community.

Expect Some Resistance

While these maybe “perfect world” examples, you are certainly aware of the kinds of problems you may encounter on your campus. But be prepared, and think through any potential conflicts. If you are well-informed, you'll have a better chance of succeeding in your efforts.

We're all familiar with the budget battles that go on. For example, it's probably futile to approach the music department and ask for funding assistance to bring in a musical act to play for the school and speak to music majors. But if the student activities office makes it happen the first time, or even a few times, the value of the program will become obvious. At that point, it might be fruitful to approach the department chair about some joint or shared funding for these programs.

There will also be philosophical differences, and occasionally a “turf war” over these sorts of collaborative programs. The chair of the music department may want his students studying Mozart, and see little value in having a contemporary musician speak to his majors. The chair perhaps doesn't realize (or doesn't acknowledge) that music students listen to a variety of music-- not just the classical music they study in class.

Likewise, you may have some resistance with some professors over hypnotists and mentalists, who may disdain their theatrical performances. Some may even condemn mentalists and magicians as some kind of devil worshipers. Don't sneer-- while college campuses seem broadminded, there can be problems with faculty and students who object to program content. So be prepared for any objections you might face. You'll find it easier to correct misconceptions if you're already expecting questions.

Your Collaborative Contribution

By going the extra mile and developing these collaborative programs, the student activities office will have done some very important things.

First, you will have demonstrated your commitment to the educational purpose of the college. When you are so obviously making a positive

contribution to the instructional mission of the campus, it will be easier for your office when that familiar budget crunch hits. The administration always strives to keep academics funded, even if they have to cut back on “discretionary” spending-- which can be programming and activities. If you can demonstrate that the activities office is making a substantial contribution to the education of your students, it may be easier to forestall any budget cuts.

Second, your office will have contributed to the education of your students. Colleges aren't just trade schools. Colleges and universities exist to teach students to *think*, to open their minds to new experiences, and to create well-rounded citizens. It's not just learning in the classroom and playing in the student center. It's a cocurricular approach, where students learn and have fun at the same time.

Finally, and most importantly, you will have fostered an ever-vital sense of campus community, that feeling that we're all part of one great whole. The buzz words aren't important-- it's the results that matter. You can generate a lasting accord and coherent fellowship among your campus citizens. That is your contribution to collaborative learning.

**Copyright By Del Suggs
All Rights Reserved
Del@DelSuggs.com
www.DelSuggs.com**