

Executive Summary

Educating the Fans

Mission:

“To curb ‘negative’ fan behavior and promote a new culture built on fan etiquette by educating current & prospective students, alumni, and the general public.”

Presidential Leadership Academy

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Introduction

Inappropriate behavior at various sporting events has become a problem at Penn State and other spectator sport organizations throughout the United States. As members of the Penn State community, we want our image to be associated with phrases like the “best fans in the land” or “less of a school and more of a community.” In attempts to curb the negative behaviors displayed by fans and to promote etiquette at sporting events, we have embraced the task of educating the Penn State community on how to improve the atmosphere of sporting events.

Our goal is to establish the mentality that a Penn State fan is someone who behaves in a positive manner; a manner that includes not only respecting fellow Penn State fans but also fans of the opposing team. To achieve the goal of propagating positive fan behavior we have highlighted a three piece proposal: publish a code of conduct to establish a foundation; reach out to students, alumni and the general public; and change the future through prospective students.

Publish a Code of Conduct to Establish a Foundation

Establishing a simple and inclusive baseline of what behavior is expected at Penn State is the first step in educating the sports spectator community at Penn State. Throughout history, codes of conduct have been established in order to distinguish the practices for that community. These codes are utilized by the leaders of the community to cite a standard as the shared ethics and moral values. Some examples from history include the following:

- Ten Commandments
- The Journalist’s Creed
- The Code of Conduct for International Red Cross

The Ten Commandments is a widely revered religious code that establishes moral laws. These morals have been passed on for thousands of years and are still considered to be basic laws of behavior in many communities. The Journalist's Creed is a professional creed for those in the journalist's profession establishing principles that journalists should uphold. Finally, The Code of Conduct for International Red Cross sets guidelines that govern the organization with great respect and appreciation for their work with governments and across varying cultures. The commonality in all of these codes is meeting the need for a clear but simple explanation of how the people of that population will interact with the world.

Iterations of these codes are adopted by community groups looking to combat behavioral and cultural issues. As illustrated by those historical examples, codes have the strength to curb negative behavior without being authoritarian. Around the collegiate community a number of codes have appeared to stifle issues similar to the ones Penn State is experiencing.

An example is Bates College in Maine. Bates College's Spectator Code of Conduct opens with the phrase "LOUD AND PROUD, BUT POSITIVE!!!" making a memorable but clear phrase to summarize its expectations. The code focuses on deterring specific behaviors: Spectators under the influence of drugs or alcohol and spectators who are using inflammatory language, either verbally or on signs, are to be removed from the area. The code specifically mentions that students will be "referred to the Dean of Students Office for disciplinary action."

Some failures of this code are that it is so specific that it is not inviting to read, a necessity for this form of education to be effective. A concise paragraph provides greater utility for the community by instilling a simple set of guidelines that are to be applied to all situations.

Penn State's Smeal College of Business does this extremely well in the academic arena with its Honor Code:

“We, the Smeal College of Business community, aspire to the highest ethical standards and will hold each other accountable to them. We will not engage in any action that is improper or that creates the appearance of impropriety in our academic lives, and we intend to hold to this standard in our future careers.”

Additional clarifications follow the above code to specify unacceptable behaviors, like those of the code from Bates College. But unlike Bates's, Smeal's Honor Code contains ideals as the groundwork. In all of the historic codes listed above there are ideals that are implemented as the basis. Then, even as circumstances change over time, the code still applies. Adopting this structure for a code of conduct gives the most value to the community.

Through the implementation of a code of conduct for Penn State sporting event spectators, the Penn State Athletics Department is able to publicly establish a minimum set of expectations. Furthermore, when those expectations are not met, the Athletic Department is then able to refer to the code as a basis and source of authority. In order to do this, Penn State's Athletic Department needs to establish the keystone traits that it wants in spectators and clearly state them in a simple format. After that, specifications should be addressed. This simple code will prove to be a powerful tool for Penn State's Athletic Department to shape a new fan culture.

Reach out to Alumni, Current Students, and the General Public

Penn State University sports fans are diverse in gender, race, income, employment, and other characteristics. They include students, alumni, faculty, and friends of the university.

No one population of Penn State fans want to be associated with the root of poor fan behavior; our main objective is to make poor fan behavior an issue for the entire Pennsylvania State University community. It is important to educate everyone about how to be a good fan using different techniques that will appeal to the diverse types of people who enjoy Penn State sports. According to Dr. Mel Mark, Director of Penn State's Psychology Department, information-only campaigns are not effective. Informing the audience about what is acceptable is not enough. It can have the adverse effect of highlighting bad behavior and its reproduction. Efforts should be focused on changing the effect that aggressive fans have on how other people respond to their acts. In order to successfully make an impression on as many fans as possible, it is important to address education through creative solutions that positively motivate rather than instigate aggressive behavior.

Many possibilities have been analyzed towards educating the Penn State community; in this paper three core ideas for policy will be discussed. The three major points that will be covered include: awareness through the Alumni Association, Res-Life, and "Know the Code." These three aspects of policy have the most promise to effectively change culture, and each targets a specific demographic.

The resources provided by the Alumni Association can publicize Penn State's effort to effect fan behavior beyond the campus and Pennsylvania area. The Alumni Association organizes away game pep rallies, posts an alumni newswire, and circulates an alumni newsletter. Utilizing these media outlets would ensure that alumni all over have a connection to Penn State's potential culture change. The fan behavior code could be included in Alumni newswires and newsletters. One suggestion made by the coordinators of the Alumni Association was to create a "Top Ten Ways to be a Good Fan" poster, a spinoff of Penn State's current top ten things to do before you

graduate. The idea is to create the poster in collaboration with the Alumni Association. Distribution of the posters at pep rallies and other venues will allow our message to reach a wide variety of Penn state fans. The association also makes an effort to greet opposing alumni when they arrive for football games at Penn State, but they don't always have information on when and where the pep rallies will be. Creating a line of communication, "the alumni connection," between Penn State's alumni association and the alumni associations of other schools would allow for better interaction between Penn State fans and the fans of other schools. Having a program like "the alumni connection" helps alumnus from other schools to feel informed and welcomed before heading to the game. This interaction is key to set an example of sportsmanship and togetherness.

Along with collaborating with the Alumni Association, making use of student based programs is also necessary to spread the message. Penn State Res-life could be used as a portal to educate current students about fan behavior. According to Andre McLeod, coordinator of South Halls Res-Life, there are current efforts in place to educate students on proper Penn State behavior and good sportsmanship. During these programs, the members of residence life try to help students understand the impact of their behavior and how it can ripple throughout the undergraduate student body. When asked about what direct measures Residence Life takes towards reaching students prior to football games, Mr. McLeod stated, "In our messages we state 'May no act of ours bring shame' letting students know to conduct themselves appropriately." Measures taken by Res-life can cause a greater impact on both new and current student behavior. Penn State Resident Assistants, as students and representatives of Residence Life, stand in special relation to both. They are expected to take on multiple roles as an advisor, community builder, and student advocate. Residential life has a big impact on first year students because all of them are required

to live in the residence halls. The high level of responsibility that RAs hold make them ideal candidates to act as ambassadors of good fan behavior.

Res-life could take part in a good fan behavior initiative by posting fan behavior bulletins in residence halls, inviting residences to attend sporting events as a group, leading informal discussions about fan behavior at Penn State, and issuing “Know the Code” tee-shirts to those who participate in events. Using bulletin boards, Residence Assistants should be required to dedicate a month to Good Sportsmanship where they address how important it is as well as highlight a Penn State sports team. Res-life could include positive fan behavior anecdotes in their monthly additions of “Stall Stories” to remind residents of positive efforts other fans are making on game day. Living on campus in residence halls is mandatory to all incoming freshman. Collaborating with Res-life will address proper fan behavior to students from the very beginning, providing a structured idea of what type of behavior Penn State expects from its’ fans.

The focus is not solely to educate Alumni and current students, but to educate the general Penn State fan as well. The proposal for the “Know the Code” initiative is to create a mobile reminder of fan behavior. Employing “Know the Code” information hubs throughout different portals at Penn State University will allow fans from all demographics to become increasingly aware of what type of behavior is expected of them. The purpose of “Know the Code” is to become an educational technique in which fans are quizzed on information provided in alternative literature expressing Penn State’s standards for fan behavior and sports trivia. Having booths set up in living commons, the HUB, outside Beaver Stadium on game day, half-time contests, and other sporting venues will spread awareness of Penn State’s fan behavior code and remind people in a subtle manner what Penn State expects from its’ fans. It will also serve as a platform for opposing fans and home fans to interact through ideas like the Hug an Opposing Fan Timer,

where during half-time a clock counts down and opposing and home fans who are passing the table have to hug each other and receive free incentives. The “Know the Code” initiative avoids reaching Penn State fans solely through literature and motivates fans to educate themselves so they can receive free memorabilia.

Change the Future through Prospective Students

One of the most effective steps in curbing negative fan behavior at Penn State would be to tackle the problem before it develops. With every class of prospective students comes the opportunity to restart and implement a new approach. These students can play integral roles in propagating a new culture.

During initial research of Penn State’s activities to promote positive fan behavior in relation to its incoming students, we found that no initiatives or programs currently exist. Instead there are only policies that exist to promote appropriate campus wide culture. As a result, we feel that it is imperative that Penn State increases its actions to counter these negative issues. When one considers what a prospective student is, they often imagine a student who is "most likely" going to attend that particular university. We have chosen to classify a prospective student in three different stages: 1. touring Penn State 2. accepted to Penn State but not yet confirmed to attend 3. confirmed to attend Penn State in the Fall/Spring.

In choosing the methods we would use to target and reach out to these prospective students in their different stages we looked at all the available outlets that would allow us to provide facts and encourage a new culture on a large scale. Thus, in order to enrich our new students, we have created potential policies to be implemented by Penn State. These policy ideas are geared at

potentially altering three programs conducted by Penn State: “Lion Scouts/Ambassadors, “Welcome to Penn State” folders, and the FTCAP Orientation.

As students become interested in attending Penn State, they often visit the campus in order to get a better idea of what their future home will be like. This is the perfect opportunity to create an initial sense of Penn State's pride as respectful fans of various sports. The Lion Scouts & Ambassadors Program takes groups of students on tours, providing historical facts about the Penn State Campus. We want to propose a policy of adding a section to these tours focused on the sportsmanship of Penn State Fans at the benefit of students and their families. A change like this would not be hard to incorporate since these tours are given by students who can provide first-hand information, as well as being seen as role models to these students.

As students are accepted to Penn State we feel it is important to take that initial idea of Penn State pride and make it more concrete. All freshmen accepted to Penn State receive a “Welcome to Penn State” folder that contains important information such as the location of dorms on campus, organizations on campus, tuition expenses, and maps. These folders contain everything a Penn State student would need except one integral pamphlet of information. These welcoming folders lack a copy of Penn State’s edition of the “Penn State Pride: What Every Fan Should Know”.

We want to implement a policy of adding a copy of this informative pamphlet to Penn State’s accepted student’s folder. The pamphlet is aimed at being engaging, informative, and of course amusing. The pamphlet is to take on the characteristics of one of Penn State’s current media sources that has proven to be very effective, the *Stall Story Series*. Like the stall stories, these pamphlets will be a mixture of notices with catchy fonts and bright colors. Some preliminary ideas that could be used include the addition of the code of conduct, a short biography on Coach

Paterno and his idea of "Success with Honor", the "We Are" story which is a symbol of Penn State's pride and integrity, a listing of all the sports played at Penn State (we do play more than just football), a list of the seasonal football games, advertisements for the PRIDE program & their fan ambassadors initiative. In regards to making it somewhat engaging, we could include a Sudoku puzzle (everyone loves these), or a crossword puzzle with answers like Joe Paterno, sportsmanship, etc. The goals of the pamphlet are to spread awareness of sports events on campus, call attention to how one should behave at these events, and provide more exposure to groups on campus that aim to uplift the reputation of Penn State Fans.

Now we will focus on engaging prospective students once they have been accepted to attend Penn State. Some of the most effective ways to communicate to prospective students is during the First-Year Testing, Consulting, and Advising Program (FTCAP). In FTCAP, students take tests and are also given campus tours, brochures and brief presentations by the Admissions Office and their academic colleges to get a general idea of what Penn State is like. Currently there is no information for prospective students in the FTCAP Program about good sportsmanship. However, brief information about the new Penn State culture of being 'the best fans' can be incorporated in the brochures and presentations.

According to Dr. Michelle Kirsch, Director of Administrative Operations of the Schreyer Honors College, who has previously worked over FTCAP programs for new students, on FTCAP day a 'classroom setting' is done with the students during which case studies and discussions are presented. She added that this setting would be a key area to incorporate a few postulates on positive fan behavior. Further, the FTCAP office has an online tutorial/quiz about academic policies and procedures at PSU which they ask new students to complete before they come to

FTCAP. Some of the rules and regulations of good fan behavior can be included into the quiz or in the alcohol information distributed to new students.

The purpose of talking about fan behavior during FTCAP is to have students begin thinking about the issues before they take classes for the first time. FTCAP leaders should spend about 15-25 minutes addressing the issue, and they need to show some of the videos that are currently on YouTube. The Ohio State riots and the students at the PIKE fraternity who threw beer cans at an Ohio State fan need to be shown to students to convince them that this indeed is a problem. Students should also get some kind of handout explaining available resources, including Paternoville, Rally in the Valley, etc., so students can get involved.

Conclusion

Promoting a change in culture is a difficult goal to accomplish. Defining unacceptable fan behavior is essential to affecting change and will be the first step for Penn State's Athletic Department. Once defined, the obstacle of ambiguity amongst Penn State fans can be overcome through education. First, develop a code of conduct as the foundation for fan behavior. Then reach out to the entire Penn State community and make them aware of the Athletic Department's goals and intentions. Finally, solidify the future by educating prospective students as they are brought into the Penn State community.

From students to alumni, families to faculty, and of course our friends from visiting schools, Penn State wants to encourage positive behavior at all sporting events. The message is simple: we are friendly and enthusiastic; we are respectful of our rivals and each other; we are the embodiment of the virtues of this institution; we are Penn State.

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