

Fan Behavior:
Leadership & Organizations
Proposal

Mission:

To involve organization leaders in affecting positive change in terms of Penn State fan behavior.

The Presidential Leadership Academy

Presented April 25, 2010

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Introduction:

In order to create a positive impact in terms of fan behavior, student leaders and campus organizations must be involved in the process. They encompass the fan base at Penn State in addition to representing the values that Penn State upholds. Organizations serve as an important resource to reach out to fans and make a difference in the fan atmosphere at Penn State. In the formation of this policy, we outline five different initiatives to actively engage student leaders and campus organizations to promote a positive change in Penn State fan behavior. First of all, a segment on fan behavior should be incorporated into the University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) Encampment. An Adopt-A-Team Program should be initiated to establish a connection between Greek Life and Student Athletes. In order to connect fans within the Big Ten Conference, we propose a fan exchange program. We also propose an alumni fan ambassador program. Finally, we suggest expanding TailGreat and featuring student organizations.

Encampment:

Encampment, an annual event at Penn State sponsored by the University Park Undergraduate Association, is an outlet to reach a multitude of student organizations on campus at one singular event. Every organization president is invited to the event and encouraged to send a representative. During Encampment, the students hear formal presentations from various alumni, administrators, and student leaders, as well as engage in peer-led discussions on a variety of campus issues such as tuition, drinking culture, and housing (Bard).

The Penn State PRIDE organization is already in the process of planning their own Sportsmanship Conference, which they describe as their version of Encampment (Rush). However, in order to reach a wider range of organizations, we propose to incorporate the topic of fan behavior in the existing structure of Encampment through either a formal presentation from an administrator in the Athletic Department, a coach, or a student athlete, or as a topic for discussion amongst the student leaders. Many organizations at Penn State do not see fan behavior or sportsmanship as an issue that they can directly affect. By including the issue of fan behavior within the agenda of Encampment, more student leaders will become aware of the issue and realize that their groups hold the potential to help make a difference. Overall, Encampment provides the opportunity to address a large audience of student leaders and educate them on the importance of the university issue of fan behavior.

Adopt-a-Team:

The Greek Letter Organizations are one of the most visible communities amongst Penn State student and alumni organizations and therefore are an essential group to include in initiatives to improve fan behavior. Fraternities and sororities have turned negative events such as State Patty's Day into opportunities for community involvement, which the borough has hailed as a successful operation (Koehle) (Goreham). Fraternities and sororities have also already begun to influence positive behavior in Penn State sports, such as with the Pink Zone Lady Lions event where fraternities and sororities were awarded CORE points for having the majority of their chapters participate. Furthermore, composed of over 4,000 students, Penn State Greek Life, one of the largest Greek Life systems in North America, has over eighty-nine operating fraternity and sorority chapters, each with their own governing boards, constitutions, alumni corporations,

advisers, and national or international organizations (Penn State Live).

To utilize the influence Greek organizations have on Penn State athletics, an Adopt-a-Team program should be implemented. The first instance of an Adopt-a-Team program in the Big Ten Conference occurred at Ohio State University, where Greek organizations paired with athletic programs to support teams at their events in a mutually-beneficial relationship where athletes interacted with the fraternities and sororities at their philanthropic events (“Conference Presentations”). To implement such a program, the university Greek Life Offices, the InterFraternity Council and the PanHellenic Council would work in conjunction to incentivize the pairing of fraternities and sororities to support sports teams.

The Adopt-a-Team program would have three primary goals. The first would be to utilize the mobility, networking, and resources of the Greek community in a positive direction for fan behavior. The second would be to solve attendance and spirit issues with a variety of sports at Penn State. The third and final goal would be to create a connection between athletes and Greek Life.

Overall, the proposal aims to provide under-supported sports programs with a greater fan base. Therefore, football would not be considered for the Adopt-a-Team program. Fraternities would request a team, preferably on a first-come-first-serve basis in order to promote proactive involvement, and then ask a sorority to partner with them in supporting this team. Fraternities will participate based on the incentive of Accreditation/CORE points, community service hours, and sorority relations. Sororities will participate to earn community service hours, build relationships with athletes, and develop fraternity relations. Athletes will be receptive at the request of the athletics department, for the additional attendance at games, and for the strengthened fan involvement the proposal will create.

Fraternity and sorority pairs will be present at every home game, which will provide them with the opportunity to earn multiple community service hours for attending games. We also propose that the IFC/PHC and University Athletics create an award to recognize optimal involvement, based on the most energetic and courteous participation in the Adopt-A-Team program. Athletes could also possibly be surveyed at the end of each season for their opinion of the support provided by the fraternity and sorority pairing. If they determine the involvement of the pairing unsatisfactory rather than beneficial, the fraternity and sorority will lose the opportunity and benefits of supporting this team. The Adopt-A-Team program will foster a connection between Greek Life and Penn State Athletics and provide momentum for greater change in the fan atmosphere.

Big Ten Fan Exchange Program:

Similar to the alliance between athletes and Greek life proposed above, we propose a fan exchange program to foster positive relationships between fans across the Big Ten Conference. Students can sign up to be a visitor at an away game and stay with a host student or group of students from the home team's school.

The Big Ten has historically encouraged good sportsmanship from athletes and fans and has an Outstanding Sportsmanship Award, but the conference has no current program similar to a fan exchange ("Big Ten Recognized 22 Outstanding Sportsmanship Award Winners"). Therefore a fan exchange program could be beneficial. Brad Traviola, Deputy Commissioner of the Big Ten Office, was interested in the initial idea of the program and will hold a preliminary meeting to obtain feedback from other Big Ten staff members (Traviola).

To implement such a program, policy would need to help ensure that both the visiting and host students represent their universities well and are devoted to having a positive experience. Thus, an application or recommendation will be required to participate in the fan exchange program. Initial student organizations to participate in the program should include Penn State groups such as PRIDE, Blue & White Society, and Lion Ambassadors whose missions are tied to promoting Penn State spirit. PRIDE Public Relations Director, Caitlin Rush, has offered to propose the exchange program as a partnership between PRIDE, Lion Ambassadors, BWS, and PLA at an upcoming PRIDE meeting. The response will give an indication whether other student organizations would be interested in getting involved (Rush). It may also be beneficial to the program to include the Alumni Association or State College residents. Some students may feel more comfortable staying with a family, and many families and alumni would welcome the opportunity to host visiting student and share the Penn State pride and tradition.

To promote the program at other Big Ten Schools, Mr. Traviola suggested that a representative from Penn State should attend this summer's Sportsmanship Summit at Iowa University (Traviola). Student organizations present at the summit will promote interest with student leaders across all Big Ten Universities. The fan exchange program would draw on resources from students, alumni, and athletics. It is important that this initiative be a joint effort.

Alumni Involvement:

The alumni represent an important group within Penn State's fan base. Their influence and strong connection to the Penn State community is important to include and draw from in the formation of a policy to improve fan behavior. The Penn State Alumni Association serves as an important outlet and resource to spread messages about Penn State pride and encourage respect

at sporting events. Last year, the Centre County Chapter of the Penn State Alumni Association began a sportsmanship initiative in an effort to spread a positive presence aligning with our current goals for change (Campolongo). These efforts center around football and include a welcome booth for visiting fans in addition to volunteer alumni who walk around the tailgate fields with literature outlining ways Penn State fans can exemplify the passion and pride. They also provide Penn State fans with signs welcoming the visiting team (Campolongo).

While the efforts of the Centre County Chapter are important, they only represent a very small portion of the 80,000 – 90,000 members who comprise the Alumni Association’s membership and therefore their efforts have a limited impact (Caputo). We propose to implement Alumni Ambassadors at football games as an expansion of the Center County Chapter’s initiatives. These Alumni Ambassadors should be dedicated fans who come from regions throughout the Penn State Alumni Association and express an interest in making a positive difference in the fan atmosphere at Penn State. They should hold strong motivations and skills to interact with fans and spread the meaning of exemplifying a “good Penn State fan.” Given that alumni are very influential at Penn State, their presence as ambassadors encouraging positive fan behavior on football Saturdays will complement PRIDE’s fan ambassador initiative very well. We propose that the Athletic Department become involved with this effort in order to maximize resources and create a strong three-way partnership between alumni, students, and athletics. The Alumni Association and Athletic Department should work together to identify these Alumni Ambassadors and organize these individuals, so that they reach as many fans as possible in the tailgate fields. Through their multiple media outlets such as the Penn State Football Letter, Alumni Insider, and Penn Stater Magazine, the Alumni Association can promote this initiative and spur alumni interest and involvement.

The central purpose of the Alumni Ambassador program is to focus on setting a new standard for fan behavior at Penn State. These Alumni Ambassadors will aim to integrate Penn State principles into fan behavior, showing that being a good Penn Stater means being a good fan. By presenting positive messages about the meaning of being a Penn State fan in an interpersonal, fan-to-fan dynamic, change can occur in a grassroots manner. Focusing on welcoming visiting fans is still important, but with a focus on reforming the behavior of Penn State fans specifically through the Alumni Ambassadors initiative, both issues will be addressed (Campolongo). It is very important to include alumni in this policy, given their influence, and with a visible presence as Alumni Ambassadors, they hold the potential to spur change, particularly with other alumni and adults.

TailGreat:

The proposals above address the involvement of specific organizations, while enhancing the TailGreat program holds the potential to connect organizations from many sectors of the Penn State fan base. Currently, the Blue Band TailGreat Show is presented before every Penn State home football game and is sponsored by gopsusports.com and the Penn State Athletic Department (gopsusports.com). The event starts in the Bryce Jordan Center three hours before kickoff with games and activities. Approximately two hours before the start of the game, the show starts on the floor of the BJC where cheerleaders, Lionnettes, and Blue Band Members perform for the crowd (gopsusports.com). Currently, this event provides children with the opportunity to interact with the cheerleaders and meet the Nittany Lion. In essence, the pep rally is geared towards families and does not attract many current students. As far as student

involvement, The Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon is the only student organization that assists with a specific TailGreat show beyond the student groups mentioned above.

Although the family-friendly atmosphere is an important component of game day for families, expanding the involvement of student organizations would help to increase student attendance at TailGreat. If student organizations are given the opportunity to perform as a special feature at select TailGreat shows, these individuals will attract more of their friends and family to attend the event. Many interested student organizations could maintain a family friendly environment, such as a capella groups, dance ensembles, and cultural organizations. Other suggested ideas include approaching Penn State student groups such as Lion Scouts, Lion Ambassadors, and Blue & White Society to provide interactive activities such as Penn State Trivia. Penn State Homecoming could also help plan a TailGreat show to culminate Homecoming Week and possibly feature the organizations who participate in Homecoming events such as the Talent Show. These organizations are interested in helping to spread Penn State pride as well as preparing everyone for the game ahead.

In addition to expanding the student involvement at TailGreat, the inclusion of multimedia in regards to fan behavior should also be provided. Videos energizing the fans while still promoting positive behavior suggested by the marketing group could also be shown during TailGreat in order to inspire positive fan behavior and support of the Nittany Lions. These ideas could include guest speakers such as Penn State Coaches, Varsity Athletes, and Penn State Club teams. While these speakers may not be directly involved in Penn State Football, they can all provide anecdotes and stories on how to fully support all of the teams and also explain what it means to be Penn State fan. In addition to multimedia presentations, we would like to incorporate athlete features at TailGreat. This would involve athletes or coaches appearing in

person and speaking, presenting, or leading an activity for the crowd. An example of an interactive activity would be the basketball team hosting a free-throw contest for anyone who volunteers from the crowd prior to the event. The presence of athletes will draw more fans to attend the program, given the importance of athletics at Penn State and the way athletes are admired and celebrated by students, alumni, and all fans.

Overall, the objective behind these proposed changes is to increase student attendance at TailGreat in a way that will hopefully decrease the amount of tailgating occurring prior to the start of Penn State Football games. It will also allow the Penn State Pride to be displayed by a multitude of student organizations. Involving more student organizations will hopefully attract more Penn State students to attend TailGreat because they will come to the Bryce Jordan Center to support their friends. Furthermore, involvement from student athletes and Penn State coaches as well as using multimedia will provide a platform for information on fan behavior to reach a targeted audience prior to certain athletic events.

Conclusion:

Organizations play an essential role in addressing fan behavior and have the resources and membership to successfully spread these ideas and implement the above policies. UPUA Encampment will incorporate fan behavior into an established event to educate student leaders and motivate them to make a difference. The Adopt-A-Team program will involve Greek Life and further extend the message. Through alumni involvement, another demographic of the fan base will be reached and the alumni will continue to exemplify the Penn State pride and respect. TailGreat has the potential to become an integral part of a new Penn State culture and

community. After creating an image of positive fan behavior that is embraced by the Penn State community, we hope to share our values with the Big Ten Conference through the fan exchange program. These five initiatives will build a positive fan environment that holds the potential to create lasting change in fan behavior.

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