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A seminar for student leaders to engage and retain members in student-led organizations

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A Seminar for Student Leaders to Engage and Retain Members

in Student-Led Organizations

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Entrepreneurship and Marketing

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Dedication

   I would like to dedicate my thesis to the multiple clubs and their leaders that I have gotten to be a part of over the years. I would like to especially thank Dustin Holmes and Jenelle Pierce for being wonderful leaders, who have heavily inspired the research that I have done. Thanks to Bailey Coppedge for not only writing the research that I based my thesis on, but also for being an amazing leader who still inspires me years later. Thanks to both Dr. Linda Frost and Dr. Greg O'Dea who have been supportive during my time in college. Thanks to Dr. Phillip Roundy who has been working alongside me on writing this thesis and providing deep insight and resources on leadership. Thanks to my siblings who have always been not only thoughtful leaders, but also inspired me to conduct further research into SLOs and how to attract and maintain members. Thanks to my online friends who have helped me stay sane while writing the thesis; you guys are genuinely amazing and I love you guys. And finally thank you to my Mom who has helped me so much while I wrote this thesis and provided advice that helped shape the direction of my thesis. It would not be the same without her, and I am thankful to her for helping me stay on track.

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Abstract

The challenge of attracting and maintaining members in student-led organizations (SLO) inspired this thesis. Current research literature was used to create a presentation for student leaders. The presentation applied marketing principles as well as best practices suggested by the research. Interviews with four student leaders and two administrators involved in student activities were conducted to interact with the research. Their insights suggested that the strongest factor in attracting students was social, whether personal invitation or a sense of belonging to the group. The strongest deterrent to participation was a perception that the benefits did not outweigh time commitments to school and work. Best practices based on the research included communicating values and goals, promoting community, offering a variety of opportunities, and utilizing a variety of modes to connect with students. The process of assembling current literature into a presentation and receiving feedback from student leaders based on their experiences provided practical insights into best practices for attracting and maintaining students.

A Seminar for Student Leaders to Engage and Retain Members in Student-Led

Organizations

This project was built on the research of Bailey Coppedge, who conducted a qualitative study to understand how to engage students in student-led organizations. Extending her work, I developed the idea to create a seminar that would equip student leaders to attract and maintain club members. I adopted Coppedge's (2019) definition of a student-led organization (SLO):

> A club or organization that primarily operates, meets or practices on the school's campus and that is officially registered as an organization with their school, as reflected in the club or organization's inclusion in the system housing the school's data about student-led clubs and organizations. (p. 4)

Coppedge (2019) broke down SLOs into four different groups which are Greek life, sports clubs, professional organizations, and student interest groups. Greek life are chapters of national fraternities and sororities. Sports clubs are sponsored entirely or partially by the students who participate in the club. Professional organizations are focused on a field of study such as computer science or marketing. Professional organizations can be a chapter of a national organization, but there are many that are not part of any parent organization. Finally, student interest groups are focused on a non-academic interest like movies or volunteering. For the sake of this research, I applied concepts and conducted research around a variety of student-led groups.

The goal of this research was to create a seminar to present live or on video to student leaders at a medium-size state university in the Southeast. Based on the literature review, I first communicated ideas for developing a common goal for all involved with an SLO. Second I wanted to build healthy commitment within the executive team and also among the students who

decided to participate. I wanted to make sure that the executive team for the next semester could stand on the shoulders of those who came before, but also that those who were not part of the executive team were encouraged to help and were properly equipped to become leaders after the current team left. Third I wanted to give a template to create a strong social function so that those who were in an SLO felt like they were part of something and not just obligated to attend weekly meetings. Fourth I wanted to overall create value for students so they could better structure their SLOs. This paper details the process of developing the seminar, the insights from those who watched it, and the opportunities revealed from the project.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review began with several articles that explained why SLO engagement was important for student growth. SLO engagement fostered integration and retention (Braxton & McClendon, 2001), inspired growth (Kuh et al., 2008) and aided transition to college (Robinson and Gahagan, 2010). Next, research on why students engaged in activities and the values obtained from SLOs built an understanding of the issues. Munoz, Miller, and Poole (2016) in "Professional Student Organizations and Experiential Learning Activities," gave a clear idea of why students decided to engage with SLOs. Munoz, Miller, and Poole (2016) also wrote "Who Are You Going After?" and broke down students' interests in SLOs to three groups which are Motivated Advocates, Uncovered Talent, and Indifferent Agents. Astin's (1999) theory also provided theories for education and how SLOs needed to focus on what outcomes they wanted for their students. Astin's (1996) article "The Role of Service in Higher Education," explained how roles of service can contribute to growth like leadership and critical thinking. Next, the ways that leaders could attract and maintain students was investigated in the literature. Rahman, Zakariyab, Jannatun, and Ahmada (2020) applied research from Astin (1996), and

Buckley and Kinzie (2005) and Henderson (2017) provided information on the benefits of being

in an SLO for specific measures of time and how that impacted skills learned. Finally, Clark and

Kemp (2008), and Coppedge (2019) contributed to how to apply marketing theory to build

SLOs. This literature provided the background needed to understand the unexplored

opportunities in my research.

The Importance of SLO Engagement

Braxton and McClendon (2001) in "The Fostering of Social Integration and Retention

through Institutional Practice," stressed the importance of on-campus activities and policies to

increase student retention, health, and social integration. They indentified eight domains of

institutional practice, which included student affairs programming. Though SLOs were a wider

group of activities beyond student affairs, the insights into the benefits of this programming

informed the purpose of SLOs. Braxton and McClendon (2001) identified one goal of

programming to help with career and academic planning. They also recommended programming

to help with relieving student stress. Third, they stated that programming should promote a wide

variety of culture on campus. These three goals were realistic opportunities for SLOs. The goal

for any SLO will be to foster a stronger sense of social integration into campus life and to

provide value according to what the SLO's primary goal is. For example, a chemistry SLO

provides chemistry related experience like speakers and opportunities to network with chemistry

focused jobs, but could also help students relieve stress by promoting friendships and advice

among students. It could also bring together students from diverse backgrounds that have a

common interest in chemistry. As the chemistry student leaders seek to build engagement, an

awareness of these three important goals will help them plan.

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) began their research by stating the importance of college to the "cognitive, social, and economic benefits to individuals—benefits that are passed onto future generations, enhancing the quality of life of the families of college-educated persons, the communities in which they live, and the larger society" (p. 540). Unfortunately, their statistics showed that only half of students finish their degree, with another seven percent of students going to two more colleges to finish their degrees. This research indicated that student-led organizations increase student retention and success. In their research they determined five important aspects to student success which included student background characteristics, structural characteristics of the institution, interactions with peers and college staff, student perception of the learning environment, and finally the effort the student puts forward to learn. For our research the most important part is the data related to interactions with faculty and peers at college. Another important finding was the importance of the first year of college to the student's success. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) used logistic regression to analyze the variance of factors in students' first year GPA. They found that when student engagement in purposeful educational activities was added to the model, there was a 13% increase in variance-explained in GPA. After entering first year experiences into their model of students' first year GPA, student's prior academic achievements, pre-college experiences, and parent's education became a statistically insignificant factor.

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) found that students who went to colleges that offered complementary initiatives benefited heavily. Simply offering the programs alone were not beneficial, so it was important to have experiences for all students and for faculty and staff to keep encouraging students to participate. The researchers also stated the importance of classrooms working with culture-building strategies to help strengthen the learning in the

classroom. They stated the importance of faculty announcing the complementary initiatives, but also campus events and deadlines for procedures like registration (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008, p. 557). Professors needed to make their students aware of all the opportunities their students had on campus and help push them towards activities that will help strengthen them. This would include not only events in the professors' disciplines, but all clubs. English professors, for instance, would put chemistry club opportunities in front of their students who might be interested in taking those opportunities.

Robinson and Gahagan (2010) wrote "Coaching Students to Academic Success and Engagement on Campus," which discussed the hard transition between high school and college, even if the student was a socially active person who never had to worry about getting good grades. In Robinson and Gahagan's (2010) research they emphasized the importance of having an academic coach help map out academic careers and aim for fulfillment. They named SLOs as crucial for engagement with the campus because activities helped students take those concrete steps towards not only achieving their academic goals but also creating a network of lifelong friends. Additionally, through SLOs, students could meet someone who is able to provide knowledge and insights into college that might be akin to academic coaching. While SLO involvement might not be as hands-on as an academic coach, it can help point students in the right direction. Thus, student-led organization leaders should work towards providing the best material they can to further students' academic knowledge and help refine students' goals. Student leaders might want to market these benefits to their intended audience.

Why do Students Engage?

Munoz, Miller, and Poole (2016) wrote "Professional Student Organizations and Experiential Learning Activities: What Drives Student Intentions to Participate?" They found

that students like engaging with SLOs that lead to career growth and that provide contact with

professionals. Munoz, Miller and Poole (2016) recommended enhancing membership

recruitment and retention by focusing on activities that strengthen student-to-faculty contact,

career exploration, and skill development. The goal of any SLO should be to help synthesize

what is learned in the classroom and apply that to the work field. The concept of contact with

professionals provided many opportunities. For example, business speakers could be scheduled

regularly, students could have access to professional mentors, and clubs could provide

opportunities such as job shadowing or question and answer sessions. The second concept was

professional development, and possible opportunities for an SLO include interacting with faculty

mentors, exploring career options, and participating in training and extracurricular activities,

which can include working with a small- to medium-sized business.

Munoz, Miller, and Poole (2016) also wrote, "Who Are You Going After? A Practical

Typology to Generate Engagement in Professional Student Organizations," in which they broke

down three different types of student segments to help SLOs understand their audience and build

engagement. These segments are Motivated Advocates, Uncovered Talent, and Indifferent

Agents. Motivated Advocates accounted for 62.8% of the three groups and were the most

committed to the SLO and networking. Motivated Advocates were the true believers of SLOs

and with this group it was important to include a wide variety of active learning experiences, like

working with small- to medium-sized businesses. Next, Uncovered Talent, or the unconvinced

talent, accounted for 18.2% of the study and were not as convinced about the goals of the SLO as

the above group, since they were comprised of an older group of people, around 29 years of age.

Interestingly they were not as interested in doing active learning activities like Motivated

Advocates. This might stem from the fact that they have seen firsthand the benefits of just

getting their degree and getting a job. For this group it would be important not to focus on the active learning aspect, but the value that the SLO will provide for them.

Finally, Munoz, Miller, and Poole (2016) identified Indifferent Agents, which accounted for 19% of their sample and were on the opposite side of the spectrum of Motivated Advocates as they do not have a desire to network or engage in the social aspects of the SLO. The social aspect included events, participating in social networking like Twitter, group experiences, and appeals to network with existing businesses. Indifferent Agents got the most value out of individual experiences like internships. Munoz et al. (2016) found that ethnicity, marital status and workload were not significant factors to the formation of clusters. This data was important as it showed that there is no need to differentiate marketing based on ethnicity. Also, while workload can be an issue in being able to attend a meeting, it does not discount Indifferent Agents specifically from creating time to join an SLO if they perceive value in it.

Astin (1999) wrote "Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education" in which he described a model for understanding how students engage at college. Astin (1999) focused on common educational theories like Subject-Matter theory, which is the theory that students just need to be given the right material and then they are prepared for the work field. The other common educational theory is the Resource Theory, where college administrators believe providing a wide variety of resources like counselors and labs will help create interest. While these theories might create interest for the well-prepared, assertive students, many students did not benefit from these approaches. Astin (1999) described the importance of student involvement in co-curricular activities and how the amount of engagement was directly proportional to the benefit students derive from college. He noted that this engagement required students to invest psychosocial and physical energy. An important

application from Astin (1999) was for student leadership to focus on the intended outcomes for

students engaging with their SLOs. SLO leaders must find a hook that will motivate students to

engage with the activities. To keep students engaged, SLOs must go beyond subject matter to

consider the motivation of students. A focus on content that creates that motivation is important.

In Astin's (1996) article "The Role of Service in Higher Education," some principles

apply to those who participated in community service in SLOs. He reviewed studies about those

who volunteered and those who had leadership positions. Some of the studies included service

through extracurricular activities. Astin found that immediate or short-term benefits fell into

three possible outcomes, which were civic responsibility, academic development, and life skill

development. Outcomes that were emphasized in his research were leadership and critical

thinking skills, interest in graduate study, and improved commitment to racial understanding. In

the long-term, involvement resulted in increased enrollment in postgraduate study, increased

volunteer activities after college, and increased socializing across racial/ethnic lines (Astin, 1996,

p.16). Astin also found that those institutions that assigned a high value to engaging in

community service experienced an increase in students committed to serving the community

later in life.

How Can Student Leaders Attract and Maintain Members?

Rahman, Zakariyab, Jannatun, and Ahmada (2020) conducted interviews on students who

were highly engaged with SLOs to understand the impact on them. As a basis for their research,

they used Astin's theory of student involvement, which stated that to the extent that students are

"actively involved in their learning and development programs, directly it would increase the

chances of success in their academic performances" (Rahman, 2020, p. 210). The results were

that involved students had positive experiences, gained various soft skills like time management,

got better academic results, and felt comfortable and confident for class presentations. Rahman et al. (2020) noted that those who were involved with multiple college activities and leadership experienced improved decision-making abilities. The study also found that students had better collaboration skills and a wider network than they would have had otherwise. Rahman et al. (2020) ended their study by stating that the role of educators is to help prepare the college ecosystem and to encourage students to partake in SLOs. The college community should do everything possible to encourage students to have strong relationships with SLOs and to focus more on student-centered learning.

Buckley and Kinzie (2005) wrote "Profiles of Student Engagement in Co-Curricular Life: Lessons from Research" using the National Survey of Student Engagement. For those who engaged for one to five hours they reported improved collaboration skills, better understanding of both themselves and people of different ethnic backgrounds, development of values, and contributing to the welfare of the community. In the six to ten hour bracket the students had a larger increase of understanding themselves and people of different ethnic backgrounds, and of development of values than what was seen in the one to five hour involvement bracket. They also reported a deepened sense of spirituality. For the 11-20 hours of involvement, there were reports of people more likely to vote in elections either locally or nationally, increased ability to solve complex real-world problems, improved learning on their own, improved communication abilities, and a greater sense of contributing to the welfare of their community beyond the students engaged for fewer hours. Finally, in the 21-31 hours or more bracket, students perceived that they gained more in collaboration, solving real world issues, voting across all levels, communication abilities, contributing to the welfare of their community, development of values, and better understanding of themselves and people of different ethnic backgrounds than what

was reported by any other bracket. On the opposite end of the involvement spectrum, no involvement in SLOs not only resulted in significantly lower gains in the areas mentioned above, but also the students' drive to get their degree and their ability to think critically were lower. This study illustrated the value of even a few hours of participation in SLOs and could be used to encourage leaders to design their events to help students increase engagement.

Henderson (2017) provided insights into engaging students in her dissertation "Student Organization Participation Benefits Inventory: Anticipated and Experienced." Henderson found that engagement in SLOs contribute heavily to students' college engagement but qualifies that, "in a social climate with increased demands on time, disconnection from others, and changes in traditional social structures, ensuring student time investment is meaningful can be challenging" (Henderson, 2017, p. vi). She found that students look for experiences based on current and future orientations. They valued current activities and the process of involvement, and they also valued career-building participation. Related to career-building, student engagement in SLOs was positively associated with graduation and development across a wide variety of topics and ideas. Henderson states the importance of finding a good fit for students' interests and needs to help proper development since a bad fit can cause negative consequences such as over-involvement and poor academic performance. Henderson (2017) used exploratory factor analysis to understand factors that made a difference in both anticipated and experienced benefits in SLOs. These factors included community service, campus involvement, conference travel, resume building, leadership skills, collaboration skills, organization skills, research skills, and meeting with faculty. She concluded that students' needs will change over their careers at college and it will be important to create a good fit in freshmen or sophomore years, since students are developing patterns that they will use for the rest of their college career. Juniors and seniors still

are developing and guidance in participation in SLOs can be beneficial as they are transitioning

to the next stage of their life. Creating an SLO inventory of outcomes for those who participate

in SLOs could benefit students, student life advisors and the campus community.

How can Marketing Theory Build SLOs?

Clark and Kemp (2008) incorporated the concept of relational marketing theory in their

research, "Using the Six Principles of Influence to Increase Student Involvement in Professional

Organizations: A Relationship Marketing Approach. Clark and Kemp (2008) observed the

benefits of the recent increase in experiential learning in the classroom and outside educational

opportunities like internships. Despite the acknowledged value SLOs provide, there was still a

low population of students in SLOs. They proposed that the reasons may be issues like not

having time, not knowing what the SLO does, or not understanding the value for the students.

Clark and Kemp (2008) emphasized the value of engaging in activities in the SLO that take what

is learned in the classroom and apply it in a real-world scenario. For example, students could

make sales calls or engage in leadership. If there is a competition for SLOs in a particular

academic field, students should consider participating in it. Clark and Kemp (2008) also

identified the importance of sales values such as customer retention, customer satisfaction, and

commitment (p.45) to retain students in SLOs.

Additionally, Clark and Kemp (2008) used Cialdini's principles of influence to develop a

better understanding of how to retain students. Cialdini's first principle was reciprocity, and

SLOs can help students feel valued so that they will engage more. This idea can also be applied

in a referral system where there is a small benefit for recommending or bringing a friend to the

SLO. The second of Cialdini's principles is commitment and consistency, which involves

building trust and maintaining that trust with members that join. An example that Clark and

Kemp (2008) provide about how to build commitment is having a member of your club speak to

a class since students will then associate membership with success and will want to achieve that

same success (p.47). Additionally, allowing students to assist in the goal setting and planning

will give a much greater sense of commitment and will strengthen trust among members. The

third of Cialdini's principles is social proof, which explains how people observe the behaviors of

others to help them make decisions (p.47). This is beneficial when there is a high uncertainty

about the club or what it does. Social proof enables them to see fellow students making the same

decision. Social proof is like reputation in that when students have no idea of the benefits of an

SLO and do not have enough time to conduct the proper research, they will rely on what has

been said by others to engage with the SLO for the first time. This principle could be applied to

an SLO by being visible and widely known by the campus community. Examples include using

posters or doing a member-get-a-member contest to generate excitement among existing

members and those that are invited.

The fourth concept described by Clark and Kemp (2008) in their evaluation of Cialdini

was liking, which means that someone will be influenced by someone they like or agree with.

Within this concept, Cialdini added five aspects of likeability: "attractiveness, similarity, praise,

repeated cooperative contact, and association" (Clark & Kemp, 2008, p.47). People are more

likely to gravitate towards those they deem attractive, but liking will also develop when

similarities are found and praised. Liking also develops after working cooperatively with

someone, in contrast to being in a competitive environment. Lastly, if people know the person,

from living in the same area, going to the same school when they were younger, or even being in

the same college class together, they will have a greater association with the SLO member and

thus are more likely engage. To apply this idea to SLOs further, having an actual student

interface during recruitment makes it more likely that the student is willing to join, since there is

a chance that the SLO member may have a previous association with other students.

Cialdini's fifth concept was authority, since people have been trained to respect those in

authority. Thus, it is beneficial to have educators, faculty, or alumni express the benefit of

joining the SLO. Also, a respected speaker coming to speak is an attraction. SLO leaders may

also develop this type of authority in the campus community. The sixth and final concept was

scarcity, which takes the form of limiting the number of positions to motivate individuals to want

to participate more. Applying this idea to SLOs by creating a limited number of positions and

creating a deadline by which you need to apply if you want to participate is important. None of

these concepts alone will cause a surge in students, but applying them together may aid growth

and engagement.

Coppedge (2019) conducted interviews of students and separated the students into two

groups. These groups were the non-users and the engaged users of SLOs. These groups could be

broken down further to include non-users who are high-achieving but decide not to attend SLOs,

and users who are only in the SLO to put it on their resume and have no interest outside of that.

Table 1 provides a visual interpretation of her findings:

Figure 1: Types of Users of SLOs Based on Findings from Coppedge (2019)

Non-users		Engaged users	
Non-users with no interest	Non-users, who are high achieving	Users with no interest	Engaged Users, who are high achieving

It is interesting to note that those in the group of high-achieving and engaged users include

student influencers, who perceived that they gained from being a part of an SLO. Coppedge

(2019) concluded that it is important for SLOs to get input and build relationships with this

group. She also added that beloved professors are an important influencer to an SLO. Coppedge

(2019) found that many students perceive SLOs as designed only for high-achieving students and

that many students who attended SLO meetings only attended for a class or to put it on their

resume (p. 16). Coppedge (2019) cited a non-user, who said "If you really enjoy something,

there's definitely a club here for you" (p. 16), which, as pointed out by Coppedge (2019), shows

that the interviewee believed themselves not to be someone who was passionate about anything

and thus could not join an SLO.

Coppedge (2019) also found that when students felt like stakeholders, namely when they

were asked for input on events, it gave students a sense of belonging. Everyone who was

interviewed agreed with this idea, even those who had no interest in SLOs. Coppedge (2019)

detailed what motivated students to come and engage in SLOs. First, students were introduced to

the SLO by a trusted friend, family member, or professor who recommended it to them. The

second major factor was social awkwardness and feeling uncomfortable in joining a new social

circle. This can be offset by knowing someone at the meeting, so if you were recommended by a

friend to attend, it would help alleviate the fear of attending. The third factor was the value

behind events and how important it was for the students to get meaningful value with engaging

with the event and the SLO in general. An interesting note here was that passionate students can

feel very discouraged when their fellow students are only there for the food and are not getting

anything of value out of the event, no matter how big the event turnout is. The fourth factor was

the value that students perceived from the SLO and whether they determined that attending

would be a good use of their time. An interesting point was that extreme users of SLOs appeared

to have a very strong sense of self-awareness of time management. The fifth driver was resume

building, which basically is value through gaining connections, having access to resources, and being able to put membership of an SLO on their resume. The sixth and final driver was students feeling responsible to the SLO. Students who perceived that their input mattered in the SLO and the community were more likely to participate more in the future.

In conclusion, SLO programming is important for students' career and academic planning. Also, participation in SLOs relieves stress, promotes a variety of culture on campus, and fosters a stronger sense of connection to other students (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). SLOs also lead to increased student retention and success compared to their non-SLO engaged counterparts (Kuh, et al. 2008, Astin, 1999). Additionally, interactions with faculty and peers while engaging with purposeful educational activities has a positive correlation with staying in the SLO and with finishing a college career (Kuh, et al., 2008). This literature review has provided material to develop the presentation for SLO leaders.

METHODOLOGY

I created a 19-minute presentation for SLO leaders as a tool to share ideas from the literature review as well as to get insights as to what would work. I decided to receive feedback based on interviews since 1) I wanted to interact over a tangible deliverable in the form of a seminar for student leaders and 2) qualitative data would be helpful for extending the current research in SLO engagement. The goal of the seminar for leaders in student-led campus organizations was to communicate best practices that would help their groups flourish. The seminar incorporated models from entrepreneurship and marketing, which student leaders could adopt as suitable. A copy of the presentation script is provided in Appendix B.

A first sample of two campus administrators were independently interviewed to add a layer of insight. They were identified based on their campus role of engaging students. Questions for administrators were:

1. What kind of benefit does your department give students?

2. What do you think keeps students from engaging more in student-led organizations?

3. What have you found helpful to engage students?

4. What approaches have you found helpful in the areas of providing value or retaining students?

5. How do you recommend measuring student participation or engagement?

The findings were summarized as qualitative research in narrative form.

Next the seminar was shared with SLO leaders, who were recruited through word-of-mouth recommendation from a variety of sources. They were interviewed independently with these questions:

1. Have you applied any of the ideas from the presentation before and how effective were they for you?

2. What do you feel will be the most helpful to attracting students?

3. What kind of value do you perceive that students get from joining your SLO?

4. What approaches have you found helpful in the areas of providing value or retaining students?

I summarized the interviews in qualitative format. After receiving all the data, I looked for common themes between the interviews and applied what I found through the literature review to the discussion of the interview results.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

Participant	Gender	Role	Interview Date
1	M	Faculty of Engagement Program	9/28/2021
2	M	Faculty of Leadership Program	12/7/2021
3	M	Graduated Student Leader	12/9/2021
4	M	Graduated Student Leader	12/9/2021
5	F	Student Leader	2/10/2022
6	F	Student Leader	2/08/2022

An administrator of a program that encourages campus-wide engagement on a mid-size university explained that one of the biggest values his department provides is community and connection to the college campus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the department still hosted events and people went to some of these events and were inspired by the material. However, he said that the most important impact of his program was to build a stronger connection with the campus for those who engaged. With his work sponsoring hundreds of events over the years, the key application is that fostering community is important. He stated that pressure, work, financial pressure, and fear of the unknown were all issues that kept students from coming to SLOs. Students need to make sure they are able to pay for college or to be able to eat so for campus events we need to make sure we provide value that would benefit their careers or provide for a need. He found that attracting students with something that they love or interests them is a great way to retain students. He also observed that having responsibility, mentorship, and reflection are also beneficial approaches to maintain students because of the perceived value. Finally, he

said that it is impossible to measure someone being engaged with an SLO or club since that can vary heavily.

An interview with an administrator of a student leadership program provided key insights. He said that the value SLOs provide is relationships and inspiring intellectual curiosity in those that attend. Students have a lot of competing demands, whether that is school, personal life, or even other SLOs. For a lot of students, they do not understand the value provided from SLOs. They rationalize not attending since they do not know anyone. Students do not know the difference between being busy and productive. This administrator believed that it is the duty of SLO leadership to communicate to students what they could achieve through membership. The administrator's view was that the internet can provide information, but creating community with other people helps apply the information in a way that causes growth. Finally, he believed that it is hard to measure being engaged in a student club. Instead, SLO leadership can evaluate how well they gave students a vision for how membership will impact their future.

A leader from a professionally-based SLO viewed the presentation and provided feedback. They found that the idea of social proof mixed with scarcity helped the SLO have value. They derived social proof from other students in their profession who had joined the club. In addition, membership required proof of being top-tier in their college, which was a type of scarcity. There were only so many people who could join so it was a desirable club. They stated that for any SLO, the most important aspect to address is attrition, since an organization can draw students in with food, but keeping people coming is hard to achieve. They mentioned that two important motivations for students were a strong resume builder and grant money for projects. Their organization also provided a special ring, which was a desirable status symbol for some members. They found that partnering with college classes can be beneficial to attract more

students and that travel can either attract more students. They cautioned, however, that travel

requirements could be a very strong negative for attending or accepting leadership roles. This

observation contradicted Cialdini's principle of scarcity as an attractive force.

Another student leader viewed the presentation and shared experiences from an interest-

based club. They stated that the idea of likeability was especially beneficial to clubs and that

those who knew people in the club were more likely to attend and return. They observed that

recommending a friend to come to their club was the best way for growth. The idea of scarcity in

their situation did not work, even for leadership roles. They were a leader for a particular club

almost the entire time they were at college, and no one had any drive to work towards replacing

them as a leader. They stated that if the leadership roles were required to change, perhaps people

would try to become president, since a resource has to feel attainable for people to try and reach

for it. They found that working with other clubs helped build a sense of community and that off-

campus events had huge value if the students were willing to go. If a friend told them that they

were going to the club, they would be more likely to attend and keep attending. They posited that

sometimes student leaders misunderstand the value that the general college population is

seeking. For this reason, it is important to listen and pivot as needed.

Another student leader was engaged in a variety of clubs including an interest-led club, a

professional club, and a sports club. Professional clubs averaged about six members and interest-

led clubs and sports club averaged about fourteen members. For sports clubs, Social Proof

proved the most valuable, since they had the weight of being on a sports team to help build trust

and maintain members. For all clubs, bringing a friend was the best approach for finding highly

engaged and motivated members. They said that having a clear message combined with the

social proof of knowing members contributed the most to being engaged with the club. It was

important for clubs to help develop relationships through activities that acted as team bonding.

The last person I interviewed validated the above points and added that having members

in the same grade or position is important to maintaining members. They told me how they had

only one freshman one year and lost that person within four meetings, but another year they had

five freshmen and were able to keep all five of them for years. They do mention the importance

of writing an application or doing an interview to get into the SLO as a way to utilize Cialdini's

concept of scarcity. Combining these qualitative interviews with the literature review revealed

important themes.

DISCUSSION

The interviews revealed common themes for helping campus organizations attract and

retain active members, which may be summarized in three questions:

1. What were leader perceptions of why students participate in student-led

   organizations?

2. What were leader perceptions of why students do not participate in student-led

   organizations?

3. What were best practices for student leaders from research and experience?

What were Leader Perceptions of Why Students Participated?

In feedback from the presentation, interviewees explained that students who felt they

were given some kind of value would be more likely to join the SLO. One student leader said,

"We didn't have money, so Reciprocity was hard to give, but times where we had pizza often got

people not only to come but to stay for the whole event, although they rarely came for events

where there was no pizza." Another leader had the same result "I've been able to draw in a crowd of 40 at one point with pizza and cool designs, but keeping people coming consistently is a huge problem." Both of these statements show that students value events where there is instant gratification, and they paid back in watching the rest of the event. For students who returned to the club, student leaders believed that they participated because they perceived value in the organization, beyond instant gratification. Examples included being able to network with professionals and career development. In addition, students visited an SLO because they perceived there were opportunities to have growth that they would not have had otherwise. Growth may include social growth, career growth, or growth through experience. Interestingly, one of the strongest reasons to participate in an SLO was an invitation from a friend or family member. One student said "Asking friends to bring friends was a consistent way to get people coming back. If Friend A bring Friend B, and they both get on the email list, Friend B may bring Friend A back next time, even if they don't feel like it." This idea helped students overcome initial awkwardness of joining a new social circle. Indeed, many students remained with an SLO because they felt a social connection with the group, which aligns with research by Clark & Kemp (2008). Thus, both professional and social values were important elements for students.

What were Leader Perceptions of Why Students did not Participate?

Students chose not to participate when they perceived that they would gain inadequate value from attending a club. The club was not within their interests, or the exchange of their time was not worth what they would gain. Also, students sometimes deemed themselves not passionate enough about the SLO's goals to contribute anything meaningful. In addition, they might have been afraid to engage with a new social circle or discovered that they were not comfortable with this group. After engaging at first, some students left SLOs because they felt as

though they were not contributing anything to the SLO. Additionally, serious students might have left if they felt that events were not being taken seriously. One leader said "The problem with (my SLO) was that the vision with either A: Learning or B: Community. While the latter was done slightly-okay, I think I focused too much on the learning I wanted (a.k.a. development) rather than surveying the student audience. Very few people were interested in making projects, simply due to the amount of project work they had to do in classes." Another student leader observed that field trips were not well attended since "others see them as too much commitment." A key insight from these statements is that students may not participate if time requirements are too large.

What were Best Practices from Research and Experience?

The research provided some insights into best practices for student leaders who wanted to attract and maintain members. First, leaders should communicate the value of the SLO and its activities to attract students. This value should be continuously communicated so that students stay with the SLO. Goals not only helped provide context for the value that the SLO provided but were also values in themselves. If the SLO had a goal that it was aiming to achieve, then students were more likely to engage with the SLO. For this reason, having something tangible for students to see when looking at posters could be a useful marketing tool, and breaking up the goal into smaller pieces to achieve the goal was helpful. Leaders could remind students of the value of student-to-faculty contact, career exploration, and skill development. One student leader explained that "The career focused club gave our members the opportunity to not only network, but also to practice skills that are crucial in the professional world such as project management, professional communication, leadership and management, creating and executing SMART goals, etc. Students liked attending SLOs when they felt it would contribute to their career growth, and

leaders would also want to communicate these goals with members. An example would be to provide access to mentors and professionals and opportunities like job shadowing through the SLO. The interview data was corroborated by Astin (1996), who identified life skill development as an important value for SLOs. Leaders may attract more students by promoting the idea of learning organization skills or an improved commitment to racial understanding. A particular life skill value of SLOs was to provide stress-relief, and this was also mentioned by Braxton and McClendon (2001). This idea could be used to promote certain club activities. According to leaders interviewed, value may include professional and life skill development, and both may be promoted by leadership.

Second, leaders should communicate the value of community that students receive from an SLO. One interviewee stressed that community should be an "easily identifiable value" so naming the group may be important. For example, an anime club gathers with others who like to watch anime together. For clubs that may not have a built-in community, creating social activities for members to get to know one another was important. Also, participating in volunteer experiences helped students feel part of the larger community. Another observation from students leaders was to create a friendly environment for all new students. Name tags or making time for introductions could promote students meeting each other. Activities that encouraged members to welcome new people could be used to build community. These ideas were supported by Cialdini's concept of relational marketing theory. For example, leaders perceived that including students in decision-making and leadership activities helped them become valuable member of the group. A benefit of this type of community building was that the workload could be spread as widely as possible so a small group of leaders that does not burn itself out. Membership in the executive team with distributed workload allowed everyone to feel included

in the SLO. Also, it was important to have a succession plan in place by the time key leadership

graduated so that the progress they had made in the SLO did not disappear but continued to be

built upon. Another community-building behavior was to encourage everyone to express

appreciation for those who participated and to build trust among members. Pairing older students

with new students helped build Cialdini's principle of social proof, in which students modeled

their activity on those they respect (Clark & Kemp, 2008). The student leaders perceived the

value of any activities that allowed people to work together as a way to build group cohesion.

The interviews confirmed social concepts from Cialdini's work, which have widespread

application for building community.

Third, offering a variety of opportunities for students could help attract a larger

population of students. One student leader explained that students in their club responded to

"getting larger projects set in motion where they can accrue grant money and local efforts to

engage in large-scale projects that will provide real-world experience and resume marks for job

searching." This observation aligned with research by Braxton and McClendon (2001) where

student leaders identified that promoting many different kinds of networking on campus helped

to build-up social integration. In addition, leaders agreed with Rahman et al. (2020), who

observed how student-centered learning was often under-appreciated as an important aspect of

wider opportunity. According to one student leader, SLO leaders might be challenged to consider

how they could widen their offerings to attract more students. As an example, an

entrepreneurship club could reach beyond the business college to attract students from every

discipline who might be interested in entrepreneurship. These ideas aligned with Henderson

(2017), who identified community service, campus involvement, conference travel, resume

building, leadership skills, collaboration skills, organization skills, research skills, and meeting

with faculty as possible opportunities for wider experience that might attract more students.

Finally, the interviewees affirmed that all leaders should implement a variety of modes

for connecting students to the SLO. One interviewee successfully used "group messages, t-shirts,

social media engagement, speaking to classes, inviting friends, and building social proof by

having the club engage with the student body at club fairs and other events around campus."

Asking faculty and staff on campus to help promote the events can be beneficial. Several

interviewees stressed the importance of professors announcing complementary activities that

enhanced the classroom through offering a wide variety of experiences (Kuh, et al., 2008;

Coppedge, 2019). Also, asking every member to bring a buddy along was shown to be very

effective with attracting new people. Participating in social networking like Twitter helped build

awareness and served as invitations to new and existing club members. In addition, having a

group chat was important to build connection outside of scheduled meetings. Platforms like

GroupMe or Slack could work to this end. Finally, promoting a stand-alone event with posters

and invitations could also attract new membership. Student leaders perceived that different

appeals worked with certain types of students, and they confirmed the importance of a variety of

modes.

In conclusion, students seem to participate more often in SLOs when the club is

recommended by a friend and they have a sense of community in the SLO. Also, clubs

experienced larger attendance when students deemed they got some kind of other benefit like

learning or food, but they returned because of the value they perceived from the club, whether

social or content-related. On the other hand, student leaders felt that their clubs did not retain

students due to lack of interest in the club or competition with jobs and studies. Best practices

based on the research included communicating values and goals, promoting community, offering

a variety of opportunities, and utilizing a variety of modes to connect with students. Leaders

found that defining what the value was for the SLO and keeping that in the forefront at all times

was important. One of the values should include promoting community for the students. In

addition, student leaders should be open to new activities, whether it is resume building or

attending conventions as a group. Connecting with students can also be broadened to include

social media, personal invitation, and having faculty promote club activities. The process of

assembling current literature into a presentation and receiving feedback from student leaders

based on their experiences provided practical insights into best practices for attracting and

maintaining students.

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Appendix A

IRB Exemption

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
CHATTANOOGA

Institutional Review Board

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TO: Luke McPherson   **IRB # 21-079**
                Dr. Philip Roundy

FROM: David Deardorff, Interim Director of Research Integrity
                Dr. Susan Davidson, IRB Committee Chair

DATE: 6/4/21

SUBJECT: IRB #21-079: A Seminar for Student Leaders to Engage and Retain Members in Student-
                Led Organizations

Thank you for submitting your application for exemption to The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Institutional Review Board. Your proposal was evaluated in light of the federal regulations that govern
the protection of human subjects.

Specifically, 45 CFR 46.104(d) identifies studies that are exempt from IRB oversight. The UTC IRB
Chairperson or his/her designee has determined that your proposed project falls within the category
described in the following subsection of this policy:

46.104(d)(2)(ii): Research only includes educational tests, surveys, interviews, public
observation and any disclosure of responses outside of the research would NOT reasonably place
subject at risk

Even though your project is exempt from further IRB review, the research must be conducted according
to the proposal submitted to the UTC IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol
must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your
research protocol, please submit an Application for Changes, Annual Review, or Project
Termination/Completion form to the UTC IRB. Please be aware that changes to the research protocol
may prevent the research from qualifying for exempt review and require submission of a new IRB
application or other materials to the UTC IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our
best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected
situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the UTC IRB as soon as

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possible. Once notified, we will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval.

For additional information, please consult our web page http://www.utc.edu/irb or email instrb@utc.edu.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Apendix B

Script for Presentation for SLO Leaders

Presentation for Building Engagement in Student-led Clubs

Hello everyone. My name is Luke McPherson,

And I am here today to present my research on building engagement in student-led clubs.

Dozens of studies have revealed that student participation in clubs radically improves their college success,

And builds up the campus community.

Nevertheless, many clubs struggle to engage members.

 I've been a member of many student-led organizations, or clubs for short,

and I've been on the executive team of a few clubs for years.

I've also had family members who were in clubs and served on executive teams in their clubs.

Through this I have been able to observe clubs that worked and clubs that struggled to engage members.

I've done additional research on how we can engage students,

and I'm going to talk about ideas that make a difference—

setting goals, building engagement, applying relational marketing theory to clubs, and brainstorming the value your club provides.

So let's begin

(Advance to Slide 2)

First, there needs to be common goals for the organization.

There are three types of goals a club should work towards,

which are mission goals, semester-long goals, and smaller goals.

Mission goals are based on the purpose of your club and can be used to attract students,

so make sure that you consider *what it is that you value*.

We will talk about values later in the presentation.

Semester-long goals are those that the executive team wants to achieve over a semester.

Examples include creating a workable prototype for a project, or reading a particular book.

Your semester-long goal can be a promotion point and it will help students focus on the value the club provides.

Either goal type can be broken up into the last goal type, smaller goals.

There will be opportunities for the members together to create smaller goals that will be implemented together.

This is important.

- Communicate goals and value frequently.
- Create opportunities to add smaller goals.
- Use the goals for outreach.

(Advance to Slide 3)

After creating your goals, it's important to make sure that everyone in the club is engaged.

It helps to include members in the planning phase of events.

This does not mean that every single member should decide when the meetings are,

but let as many students as is practical give their input on when to have special events and what kind of events they want to see.

You can use a poll to get a clearer idea of what they want.

Also, encouraging students to join the executive team gives ownership to your fellow students.

Engage your fellow executive members so that they perceive value in their roles.

Remember to spread the workload over the club as equally as possible.

Make sure roles are well-defined and that no single member overworks themselves.

Finally, create a strong succession plan with documents detailing what executive members did in their roles.

This is very beneficial to the health of the club.

I have seen clubs prosper when they had proper documentation and were able to improve upon themselves in future semesters,

and I have seen the opposite where an entire year of progress was lost,

and the following year was spent reinventing successful organization.

Invite younger members to the executive team so that you can transition between leadership as smoothly as possible.

Additionally, planning for seniors to provide mentorship to the executive team can be a beneficial way to transition between leadership.

(Advance 4)

Next we are going to consider Cialdini's principles of relational marketing in the hopes that this will inspire ideas for your club.

Dr. Robert Cialdini has worked in the field of the psychology of influence,

and his principles have been applied in relational marketing.

[Advance]

The **first principle** is reciprocity,

People like to repay social behaviors so when they are given something they want to reciprocate it.

Even giving an invitation to someone may be balanced by this person attending the club.

T-shirts are often used on campus to help bring and maintain members.

This idea can also be applied in a referral system where there is a small benefit for recommending or bringing a friend to the club.

[Advance]

The second of Cialdini's principles is commitment and consistency, which involves building trust.

Inviting students to assist in the goal setting and planning (as mentioned above) will give a much greater sense of commitment and will strengthen trust among members.

Another opportunity is sharing responsibility, such as greeting at an event or hanging up posters.

[Advance]

The third of Cialdini's principles is social proof,

which explains how people observe the behaviors of others to help them make decisions.

This is beneficial when there is a high uncertainty or when students see their peers making the same decision.

Social proof is like reputation.

When students have no idea of the benefits of a club and do not have enough time to conduct the proper research,

they will rely on what has been said by others to engage with the club for the first time.

Having a club member speak to a classroom builds social proof since students will trust other students.

This principle could be applied to a club by being visible and widely known by the campus community.

An examples includes using posters.

[Advance]

The fourth concept is liking, which means that someone will be influenced by someone they like or agree with.

Within this one concept,

Cialdini added five aspects of likeability which are "attractiveness, similarity, praise, repeated cooperative contact, and association."

People are more likely to gravitate towards those they deem attractive, but liking will also develop when similarities are found.

Liking also develops after working cooperatively with someone.

That's why working together on a service project builds up the club.

Lastly, if person X knows person Y, whether that is from growing up in the same area or being in the same college class together,

Person X will have a positive association with the club member and thus are more likely to engage.

To apply this idea to clubs further, having a student invite other students makes it more likely that they are willing to join.

[Advance]

The fifth concept is authority since people have been trained to respect those in authority.

Thus, it is beneficial to have staff, faculty, or alumni express the benefit of joining the club.

Also, authority helps build club membership when a respected professional comes to speak.

Upper classmen may also develop this type of authority on the campus community.

[Advance]

The sixth and final concept is scarcity,

which takes the form of limiting the number of positions to motivate individuals to want to participate more.

You can apply this idea to clubs by creating a limited number of seats for a "lunch and learn" or creating a deadline by which you need to register.

[Advance to REVIEW SLIDE]

None of these concepts alone will cause a surge in membership, but applying them together may aid growth and engagement.

(Advance 5)

So here are some ideas to apply on Cialdini's principles.

It is important to make the new members feel welcome.

Often food helps as a way for people to relax and meet others.

Also keep members engaged throughout the week and help them know there is a social network thanks to being a part of the club.

You can use social media like Twitter or Instagram to not only post about events, but also to interact with each other.

I would recommend having a public group chat, either by using Slack or Discord, to keep up with fellow members.

Some clubs find that having a formal or informal buddy system helps by pairing old members with new members.

Also, make sure the faculty are involved and are there to support your club.

You can send out emails asking them to let students know about special events,

 or ask them to let a student speak for a few minutes in their class to invite people.

Also constantly remind all members to bring along a friend, since as mentioned before, people will attend when invited by a friend.

(Advance 6)

So let's brainstorm on how you can build engagement by providing value to your members.

Does your club help with career growth?

Do you have events and opportunities that put students in front of professionals?

Is your end goal to promote and strengthen learning?

Are all the events more academically focused or are you focused on social integration on campus?

Is your club's goal to connect students of all disciplines and stages?

Or is your club more informal and focused on having fun?

Are all your events more relaxed in nature and focused on non-academic activities together, like movies or games?

Pause the video and take a minute to consider one or more values for your club, and then we will continue on.

(Advance 7)

 Alright thank you for doing that for me.

Now that you have considered the value your club provides, I am going to ask you to brainstorm about activities that provide value.

On screen you see activities like projects, volunteer activities, etc.

Depending on what your goal is in your club you will find certain activities will benefit your club.

These are just some common activities that research has shown to be the most effective, but you may think of others.

Pause the video and take a moment to write down helpful ideas in the lens of the value you brainstormed above.

(Advance 8)

Thank you for doing that. Now that we have both value and activities, let's talk about skills/experiences you want to provide.

Research has shown that students gain important experiences and skills from club participation.

On screen I have listed many outcomes that research has shown to be important to students as they looked back on club participation.

So now, consider the outcomes you want your students to obtain from participation in your club

The idea is that the brainstorming you do on this slide helps you focus on activities that build up members and the club.

Pause the video and take a moment to note ideas that might work for you.

Brainstorm specific ideas that would benefit your members.

(Advance 9)

We have talked about setting goals, building engagement, and applying relational marketing theory.

We have also brainstormed the value your club provides as a way to consider how to build engagement in your club.

if you implement even one idea from this presentation, it will benefit your members.

I hope something you heard today will help your club.

Remember, your club can make an important impact on the lives of your members and the campus community.

Thank you for watching. I hope you have a great day!

Appendix C

Slides for Presentation for SLO Leaders

Building Engagement in Student-led Clubs

Luke McPherson
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Goal Setting

- Three types of goals
- Communicate goals and value frequently.
- Create opportunities to add smaller goals.
- Use the goals for outreach.

Build Strong Student Engagement

- Include all members in planning
  - Poll: What sounds fun to members?
- Encourage members to participate in the executive team.
- Share the workload as widely as possible.
- Create a succession plan by documenting roles & involving members early

Apply Cialdini's theory of relational marketing

Reciprocity

- Invitations
- T-shirts
- Appreciation

Commitment and Consistency

- Involve in planning
- Share responsibility

Social Proof

Liking

- Identify commonalities
- Cooperative contact helps

Authority

- Faculty
- Upper classmen
- Professionals

Scarcity

RSVP
Limited positions
Deadlines

Cialdini's theory of relational marketing

How to apply these ideas

- Create a welcoming environment for meetings.
- Use media tools to connect between meetings
  - Social media
  - Group chat
- Create a buddy system to integrate new members.
- Get faculty involved
- Remind everyone to bring friends!

What is your value for students?

- Contribute to career growth?
- Promote learning?
- Promote social integration on campus?
- Fun?

Activities you might use to give value?

- Projects
- Volunteer activities
- Speaker series
- Community-building activity
- Community Service
- Conference travel

What do students gain from clubs?

- Skill Development
- Professional development
- Professional networking
- Student-to-Faculty contact
- Career Exploration

- Community Service
- Leadership skills
- Collaboration skills
- Organization skills
- Research skills
- Campus involvement
- Resume building
- Stress reduction

-Set Goals
-Build Engagement
-Apply relational marketing theory
-Brainstorm value

Thank you.