



CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

Building Class Unity

Speakers at national student leadership conferences often ask their audiences to identify themselves by class. When they ask for middle level students, a tentative cheer is heard. Freshmen respond with a little more confidence, and sophomores and juniors are each a little louder. When it's the seniors' turn to identify themselves, inevitably a resounding cheer echoes through the room accompanied by whistles, stomping, and clapping. The enthusiasm with which they respond is markedly different than the underclassmen.

The challenge for student leaders is to figure out how to take a group of individuals and turn them into a unified class.

Class Activities

Class activities can be a tool to help create an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership in the school.

Students who belong to classes that have a real sense of unity and class pride have a more positive school experience and often do better in school—it just makes school more fun!

The specific rites and rituals of class activities vary from school

to school, although they generally aim to:

- Develop a sense of class unity
- Create a sense of belonging for students in the class
- Increase school spirit and pride
- Represent all factions of the class



- Raise funds for class events, particularly for the senior year
- Develop leadership abilities in class members
- Work cooperatively with the student government.

The focus of class activities will vary depending on the grade level of the students.

Freshmen: As freshmen, students form their class unit, perhaps for the first time. If students from more than one middle level school come together in a high school environment, there will be many students who don't know each

other. One of the first tasks of the freshman class officers is to help the students become acquainted with each other and become familiar with the customs and traditions of the school. Engaging them in class activities right away can help students settle in and begin having a positive high school experience.

Many schools also offer other activities just for freshmen: a barbecue before the first football game, a freshmen recreation night, a "welcome to high school" event before school starts. In addition, spirit week activities during

Homecoming typically offer an excellent opportunity to involve freshmen in some fun events.

The patterns established in the freshman year will often carry through the rest of high school, so it is especially important that student leaders and the class adviser make an active effort to involve all members of the class. Although you will likely have a small group of very active students, do not let class activities become perceived as something that is closed to all but the "in" group. Encourage your fellow student leaders to find ways to involve all students.

Sophomores: In the sophomore year class efforts begin to focus more on fundraising and leadership development, while continuing to build on the foundation started during freshman year. It's a good idea to hold at least one activity to help the sophomores build a greater sense of class unity. Ordering class rings is often a rite of passage that takes place during the sophomore year; some schools organize a Ring Dance around this event. A class service project could also serve to unify the class.

In most schools, each class needs to raise funds to support the activities of the senior year such as class trips, proms, and graduation. The sophomore year is an excellent time to focus on fundraising efforts, as students usually don't have a very heavy academic load at this point and aren't preoccupied with other concerns.

Juniors: Junior year is typically focused on planning the junior-senior prom, continuing fundraising activities, and taking a leadership role in school spirit activities. A service project for the school or community is another frequent project for junior classes.

Often by this point in school, students often have settled into a routine of letting a few select members of the class organize and participate in class activities. Make an effort to shake people out of this rut—draw names randomly from a hat for people to participate in relays, have each

active member go and personally ask two non-active members to help with dance decorating or poster making for an upcoming activity, and seek out other ways to involve more people. Your overall class spirit will improve if more people are involved.

Seniors: The responsibilities for class members tend to increase as students enter their senior year. With graduation looming on the horizon, senior student leaders become focused on planning senior events, ending with the commencement ceremony and related activities. Seniors also often are the ones responsible for creating and maintaining school spirit and serving as role models for their younger peers. Seniors can set the tone for the entire school; if seniors are accepting and work to include everyone, the other classes will often follow along.

There are a variety of additional activities that can help a class develop its identity. Many schools select a class song, color, motto, and banner. Determining a gift for the school offers each class a chance to leave a tangible memento of itself behind after graduation. Sometimes these activities are seen as being extra things that interfere with the real business of school: academics. If used properly, they can become an integral part of the life of the school, providing opportunities for leadership development and involvement on the part of all students. The positive climate created by enthusiastic class members will strengthen every aspect of life at your school.

Class Officers

Elected by their peers, class officers play a special role in the activities of a class. They are the official organizers, motivators, and energizers and are expected to work with and on behalf of their peers. Their success usually depends on how well they get others involved in class activities.

The best class officer groups function as a leadership team with students in the roles of president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Committee chairs can be either elected or selected.

President—this person is the official head of the class. He or she is key in motivating other members and coordinating the efforts of the officer group.

Vice President—the second in command is typically in charge of coordinating the work of the committees.

Secretary—this person keeps records of class activities, whether minutes of meetings, or project files on class events. He or she also handles correspondence, including thank you notes.

Treasurer—he or she maintains financial records for the class and provides periodic updates. This person often assumes the role of chief financial consultant, working with committees to set budgets, securing prices on materials and supplies, and handling all financial affairs for the class.

Committee Chairs—these people coordinate the work of various committees established to perform the work for class activities. Filling committee chairs is an excellent opportunity to involve student leaders who have not been elected to office but who have good leadership skills.