

Annual Report to Senate on Orientation 2010
Senate Orientation Activities Review Board (SOARB)
November 2010

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SOARB commends student organizers, under the leadership of ORT Coordinator Sacha Gudmundsson, for outstanding cooperation and collaboration during the planning and execution of Orientation Week 2010. In particular we commend them for developing and implementing a revised schedule to accommodate students observing Rosh Hashanah and Eid al-Fitr.

Update from 2009 Recommendations.

- **Due to the changing landscape of campus facilities, coupled with the increases to student enrolment, SOARB encourages all orientation leaders/planners to review the coordination of their events; the number of participants, space requirements, and the resources required to execute the event.**

In partnership with Queen's Environmental Health and Safety, SOARB arranged for the delivery of Student Event planning risk assessment protocols to student planners and also to faculty members who approve events on behalf of their Faculties. SOARB acknowledges that work remains to be done to ensure that occupancy does not exceed capacity at any event venues.

- **SOARB requests that Residence Life be provided with clarification from SOARB on what elements of orienting students to Queen's University falls under their purview.**

Some steps were taken in fulfillment of this recommendation including a review of the role of Residence Life in the Principal's Welcome Ceremony. Direction for the Principal's Welcome Ceremony comes from the more than twenty year-old Jackson Report. The Jackson Report parts 1 and 2 describe a welcoming ceremony that mirrors convocation as an appropriate way to introduce new students to the academic/intellectual dimension of the University. Given that an inside location on campus, capable of holding the entire incoming class, no longer exists, it is logistically challenging to create an event that accurately reflects convocation as conceived by the writers of the Jackson report. It is valuable to note that convocation currently requires 18 to 19 ceremonies scheduled over a 2 week period. Additionally with Residence move-in taking place on the Saturday and Sunday before Labour Day, rather than the holiday Monday, students have been on campus for as many as three full days before being officially welcomed. However, it is the opinion of SOARB that many aspects of the Principal's welcome are worth preserving, including but not limited to, the presence of the Mayor for the link made between Queen's and Kingston, the outlining of student expectations as contained in the Code of Conduct and the participation of faculty members for the engagement and sense of academic community that participation demonstrates to the incoming class.

Since 2007 the welcoming ceremony has been held outside on the grounds of Summerhill; this location is vulnerable to weather considerations and is uncomfortable for staying seated for any length of time. In light of today's context it is essential to review this event to ensure that the placement in the schedule of events and objectives of this Welcoming Ceremony are relevant and achievable.

Additionally the Board made the following suggestions for the division of responsibility between Residences and Faculties/Groups:

- Residences should continue to take students on campus tours but those tours should focus on buildings that house services
- Faculty tours of campus ought to be centred on academic buildings and offices related to individual Faculties, Schools and Departments
- Residence Orientation should ensure that every student has access to information about academic supports such as The Learning Commons
- Faculty Orientation should educate on issues such as academic integrity
- Residence-facilitated tours on Kingston Transit should continue as a broad introduction to the City of Kingston

- Faculties should use walking tours of the city to introduce new students to the various amenities within walking distance of campus.
 - Residences should be responsible for ensuring that students understand how and when to use blue lights and other safety systems.
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- **SOARB encourages all Faculty Orientation Committees to develop more structured relationships with their respective Faculty Offices to better serve the academic requirements of the first year students as they transition to a new academic environment.**

Faculty Offices are championing the implementation of this recommendation. SOARB recognizes that, because of the yearly turnover of student planners, it often takes more than one year to implement change. SOARB looks forward to witnessing further change in the delivery of high quality, academic orientation. Faculties must set clear objectives for academic preparedness and cooperate with student Orientation organizers to develop programming that meets these objectives. Both Faculty Offices and student organizers are encouraged to provide academic programming that is engaging, informative and consistent with the spirit of Orientation Week.

Comments on Orientation 2010

In addition to recommendations that are specific to individual Faculties and Schools, and will be conveyed to them in writing, SOARB makes the following general recommendations:

In April 2009, at the formal request of Principal Tom Williams and V.P. Academic, Patrick Deane, SOARB was given the responsibility of coordinating the efforts to stop the unsafe practices associated with post-orientation gatherings affiliated with Orientation Week. The University has determined that risks to individuals, organizations, the community and the University exist.

Since April 2009 SOARB has reviewed the issue in great detail with input from University stakeholders. SOARB discussed the relationships between these post Orientation gatherings and sanctioned Orientation activities.

During this period of discussion SOARB implemented several changes to event planning, and the training and education of Orientation executives and leaders.

- Queen's Environmental Health and Safety provided risk management training to student event planners and Faculty representatives who approve Orientation programmes.
- ORT worked with the professional staff at Health Counseling and Disability Services to design and deliver more interactive alcohol awareness training to Orientation executives and leaders.
- Post-Orientation gatherings were discussed at ORT meetings. These discussions generated greater recognition of how the practices associated with these gatherings cast a negative light on the University generally and Orientation specifically. The deeper level of understanding of planners and organizers was passed to the front line leaders.
- The section of the leader contract stating "I will not promote the consumption of any substance of abuse among first year students by either pressuring them to indulge, or by buying or giving them any substance of abuse" was emphasized during contract signing.

The above initiatives have highlighted the awareness and seriousness of this issue among student Orientation leaders. Most Faculties created and implemented additional awareness campaigns for their leaders to encourage the elimination of unsafe practices including the overconsumption of alcohol.

In our review of this year's Orientation activities it is SOARB's opinion that the consumption of alcohol, during University sanctioned Orientation Activities, is not facilitated by Orientation Leaders. Alcohol is only permitted at a small number of Orientation events for incoming upper year students who are above Ontario's legal drinking age. SOARB is aware that underage students get access to alcohol and do appear inebriated at some events. This is challenging for all concerned as alcohol use is wrongly assumed to be part of official Orientation events. Some students are making the choice to drink; however, they are doing it before, after or instead of attending events.

One of the goals of Orientation is to build a strong and inclusive community of students. Evidence of the success of Orientation is that new and upper year students want to continue to build on relationships forged during those first days on campus. SOARB recognizes that ongoing relationships between upper year and new students are desirable and part of the fabric of a strong community; the issue is not the gatherings but the over consumption of alcohol and the resulting behaviours.

SOARB is aware that the dangerous over consumption of alcohol is not unique to events affiliated with Orientation. First year students, most of them underage, can get access to alcohol and some engage in harmful drinking practices. SOARB is also aware that many of our students come to Queen's with a well established history of alcohol use.

- **SOARB is unable to identify an enforceable sanction, specific to Orientation, to address the dangerous over consumption of alcohol. Rather SOARB encourages more of the initiatives seen to date to change the culture of alcohol use that exists at this and many other Universities; it is the consensus of the Board that, during Orientation Week, the social action theatre group *Existere* can make a significant contribution to changing culture. SOARB also believes that leaders will benefit from increased training in how to talk to their peers about alcohol. The Board further believes that a bigger, University-wide approach to alcohol education is required. In no way does SOARB condone the dangerous and illegal use of alcohol, especially disguised as an Orientation activity.**

Orientation 2010 intersected with two major religious observances, Rosh Hashanah and Ramadan including Eid al-Fitr. This was discussed at SOARB's January gathering of stakeholders and it was further discussed at ORT.

ORT encouraged the Faculties to accommodate individuals, within the existing schedule. In March 2010 the University was approached by members of Queen's Hillel with a request to revisit the issue on the grounds that the unique and time limited nature of Faculty Orientation days cannot be replicated at a later time; individual accommodations would mean that participants would miss several key, traditional events.

Following consultation with key campus constituents, and in the absence of a defined policy, SOARB proposed a revised schedule; however the suggested modification created problems with maintaining the integrity of Faculty Orientation programming. Through the hard work of all the students who are part of ORT a compromise was reached; Orientation Week would start one day early with a Saturday move into Residences and the Thursday activities would not include any traditional events but rather feature an interfaculty house tournament.

In future years major religious observances will again fall within the week following Labour Day; the week traditionally considered Orientation Week at Queen's.

In order to ensure appropriate notice and direction, a policy on accommodation of faith dates should be developed and approved no later than April 2012.

In formulating this policy, SOARB will first seek input from the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP). It is the consensus of the Board that any policy for Orientation be consistent with other Senate policies.

- **SOARB will consult with SCAP and other campus stakeholders before recommending a policy to Senate.**

The interfaculty day, which came about as a result of the modified Orientation schedule, was viewed by SOARB as an opportunity to introduce some new elements to Orientation Week that might address issues, such as negative interfaculty rivalry, which has plagued past Orientation Weeks, and Diversity and Inclusion which are identified priorities for the University. The creativity and commitment of a great number of students and campus partners provided opportunities for both competitive and cooperative activities based on the themes of Intercultural Competency, Recreation and Leisure and Inter-Faculty Relations. Campus partners such as Athletics and Recreation, Queen's University International Centre, Hospitality Services, Diversity and Community Development and Residence Life worked with ORT to develop the best possible programme given the short lead time. Many aspects of the day have positive potential and deserve to be explored further.

ORT is also undertaking initiatives to promote positive and increased inter-faculty relationships; these initiatives will take place during Orientation Committee and Leader trainings. One initiative will create opportunities for committees to share specifics about their organizational structure and programme with other committees and a second will see a modification of the Fall training day to create more opportunities for interfaculty interaction and collaboration.

- **SOARB makes no formal recommendation at this time however, SOARB supports initiatives that will meet the educational needs and interests of an increasingly diverse student body. Based on the results of the ORT initiatives, the recently undertaken Orientation survey and focus groups, and a follow-up survey to be administered in January 2011, SOARB may choose to make a recommendation for Orientations 2012 and beyond.**

Expectations from incoming students concerning the availability of electronic information have highlighted the current lack of a centralized information repository for information on the various Orientation programmes at Queen's.

- **SOARB recommends that the members of ORT work with each other to ensure centralized access to information. The ORT coordinator is encouraged to work with Queen's Marketing and Communications to give Orientation a place of prominence on the Queen's main page.**

Given the annual turnover of the Board, SOARB's ability to follow up with individual groups regarding specific recommendations is limited. The Board continues to seek more opportunities to guide Orientation groups and their Faculty offices in the early stages of planning their Orientation Weeks. Because the planning cycle is so tight, as groups seek to have their Orientation programme formalized between the time organizers are hired in late Fall and the end of the Winter semester when most students, including organizers, start summer jobs, substantive changes are hard to implement. It is incumbent on Faculty leadership to support and lead the Orientation programme(s) under their purview.

The value of student-run Orientation and the dedication of the student leaders cannot go unmentioned. Each year the Orientation Round Table, comprised of a small number of upper year students, primarily in volunteer positions, dedicate themselves to creating a welcoming experience for Queen's new student body. In turn, that small group leads almost one thousand orientation group leaders, Gaels, Frecs, Bosses, Capes, Teaches, Coaches, Techs, Geckos and Landlords, in welcoming almost 4,000 incoming students. These students work diligently to respond to SOARB's recommendations for change and improvement and to meet the needs of an ever-growing, more diverse student population. To do this they work with each other, their Faculty Offices, Campus Security, Environmental Health and Safety, Physical Plant Service, Room Reservations, Hospitality Services, other campus partners and the City of Kingston. Their dedication and devotion to ensuring that the incoming students are welcomed into the Queen's community is truly outstanding. While there will always be areas to improve on, SOARB is confident that the student leaders of tomorrow, will follow in the steps of this year's leaders, and the leaders who have gone before, in making Queen's Orientation the truly remarkable experience that it is.