

## Student Leaders— Key to Success

A successful Freshmen Orientation Program can be guaranteed with the proper utilization of student leaders.

At Westfield State College we have a Freshmen Orientation Program that has been developed, carried out and revamped almost exclusively by students. As a member of the Student Service staff, I have had the privilege of working with students in developing a program that, based on freshmen evaluation, can be considered an outstanding success. Students with a minimum of guidance have developed a program over a period of nine years that consistently receives a better than 95% good to excellent rating from freshmen.

Starting with Freshmen Orientation for the Class of 1976 a new format was developed at Westfield State College, changing from a one-day program to one of three days with greater utilization of students (group leaders).

Since the first year when the program received an 80% overall good to excellent rating (evaluation completed at end of program) to last year's program, which received a 95.4% overall good to excellent rating, the major change in the program has been to increase quantity and quality of our group leaders. Each year's overall rating has been consistently over 95% in the overall evaluation of the program.

Westfield State College is a small public, liberal arts college located in the western part of Massachusetts. The College's enrollment is approximately 2,700 students with a freshman class of approximately 850.

The size of the freshman class has been increased from 700 to 850 in nine years of the three-day program and the group leader core has increased from 26 to 75. We permit group leaders, who have done a good job, as evaluated by freshmen and fellow group leaders, to continue on as long as they are at Westfield. This adds maturity and experience to our program.

In the first year of our three-day program 40 students applied for 26 positions—for the Class of 1986, 125 students applied for 45 positions. So, it can be readily seen that there is a great deal of interest in being a group leader. It has become a prestigious position! Student Senate presidents and class presidents are usually included in a roster of group leaders.

Our Orientation Program is held in two three-day sessions during the last two weeks of August in order to permit group leaders to complete their work obligations before Orientation. If we were to conduct Orientation earlier in the summer, we would eliminate many good persons from our program.

The student co-directors of the program, who are selected by their

peers, are seniors who usually have been with the program for two years. Each year these directors have performed superbly in carrying out their duties.

The selection of new group leaders is made by returning group leaders, who interview candidates in teams of three. The final selection is made by a committee of eight to ten returning group leaders selected by their peers.

The qualities demanded of group leaders are those of sensitivity, sincerity, awareness of activities at Westfield State College, positive attitude toward the College and the ability to communicate well. The selection committee is very careful in selecting students who will portray good role-models for incoming freshmen. In last year's evaluation group leaders received a 99% good to excellent rating and 87.3% were rated to be excellent.

Each group leader is assigned a maximum of eight to ten freshmen each session. Some group leaders have only one session. Usually new group leaders are assigned the single sessions. The group leaders who are unassigned during a session assume responsibility for many of the activities carried on during the three-day program. This permits assigned group leaders to stay with their groups during most of the scheduled activities.

Group leader responsibilities in regard to their freshmen are as follows:

1. To contact freshmen via a letter during the summer.
2. Greet freshmen at Orientation and introduce them to roommates and other group members.
3. Stay with groups for all activities and see that all activities are attended.
4. Hopefully, develop a friendly relationship with all assigned freshmen.
5. Hold several "rap" sessions with groups to answer questions during program.
6. Within first week or two, meet again with group members, individually or in small groups to:
  - a. provide big brother or sister assistance
  - b. review academic skills booklet
  - c. show freshmen that someone really cares.
7. Contact freshmen who did not come to Orientation to offer assistance to them.

The only tangible reward that students receive for working on the program is a thirty dollar stipend for the two sessions. I am sure that, should it be necessary to cut this payment out, we would not lose any of our group leaders. Why then would students do so much for so little? Their reward is the personal satisfaction of a job well done—knowing that they may be responsible for a freshman "making it" in what can be a very trying first year. They also have a great deal of fun in working with other students in an exciting program.

I have always believed that the success of a program could be traced directly to the quality of our group leaders, not the type of activities provided. Fortunately, or unfortunately, one year we had the opportunity to test the theory when we were required to present an "academic Orientation." This involved freshmen sitting for hours listening to lectures on "How To Succeed Academically in College."

Despite many complaints about these features of the program, the overall evaluation was well over 90% good to excellent, and the group leaders received their usual high 95% plus rating. This confirmed my belief that, if our group leaders do their job, the Orientation will be a success regardless of the activities presented.

Take advantage of the leadership you have available on your campuses—involve students completely in your programs. They will do a remarkable job and insure your program's success.

Stimulate, encourage, enhance your orientation programs

# JOIN US! NODA

**NODA** is organized to meet the following objectives:

1. To stimulate interpersonal and interinstitutional communication about orientation and to provide vehicles for that exchange.
2. To provide meaningful services relating to orientation for appropriate personnel and institutions.
3. To encourage and assist in the continuing enhancement of programs and services.

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# 1982 NODA Conference October 3-6 Lexington, Ky.

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