Weekend Student Programming at Small Private Institutions
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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Student-led programming efforts gain immediate student buy-in, experience high turnout rates, and remain consistent with student event demands. Contacts report that highly autonomous student programming boards design and implement events that attract large numbers of attendees with minimal effort. Loose oversight and administrative direction invite an environment of self-ownership among student leaders that fosters impactful programming efforts. While a potential for abuse exists in all student-driven programming models, student leaders tend to adopt responsible behaviors given high responsibility for program success.

Planning entities heavily invest both time and money into traditional programming areas (e.g., spring concerts, casino nights, dances) with histories of high event attendance and student satisfaction. Programs with positive historical reputations experience high student demand; as a result, programming boards dedicate substantial resources to continuation of these programs’ development. Established programs also benefit from diminished need for continued changes year to year; these events typically occur at the same time each year and maintain fixed logistical requirements.

Programming efforts with defined desired outcomes (e.g., alcohol abuse reduction, developmental learning) benefit from intentional planning. Contacts report success in reducing the impact of alcohol usage and attendance of external parties through directed weekend programming. Some institutions’ programming boards operate with mission statements explicitly designed to offer alternative events to alcohol consumption. Programs without explicit outcome objectives encounter difficulties at all stages of implementation and assessment.

Administrators measure program success through attendance and cost metrics as well as evaluations of developmental learning outcomes for planning staff. Robust program assessment initiatives gather data on an array of components that evaluate program success and the development of student program planners. Institutions define success differently and measure outcomes with metrics that align with institutional goals (e.g., student leadership development, broad student engagement).

Programming boards design inclusive events to serve diverse campus constituencies. Inclusive programs (i.e., programs that intentionally engage otherwise disparate campus populations) experience higher attendance and offer cultural development opportunities for student participants. Institutions address inclusiveness through alternative programming structures, designated group times, and instilling a culture of diversity within student programming boards.
2) Structures for Student Programming

Organization and Planning

Instill Student Ownership of Planning Process

Programming efforts that students plan and implement autonomously experience higher turnout and generally receive more positive feedback than events institutional staff develop. Student leaders who plan programs maintain a personal stake in event success and enjoy the responsibility and autonomy they receive from programming administrations. Although the potential for abuse exists, contacts at all profiled institutions report high, if not exclusive, student autonomy in programming.

Benefits and Drawbacks to Student Ownership of Planning Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths of Student Ownership</th>
<th>Weaknesses of Student Ownership</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Increased Buy-In: Student-led weekend programs leverage immediate buy-in from the peer groups of program planners. In turn, more students attend programs organized by other students.</td>
<td>× Indirect Oversight: Institution administrators lose some control over the planning process and provide less direction to student planners on potential difficulties with programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Understanding of Student Demand: Student programming boards inherently understand the interests of their peers, which contributes to better programs. Informal peer-to-peer feedback guides program planning towards events that attract more students.</td>
<td>× Potential for Abuse: Student leaders may plan programs that do not align with institutional goals or fail to accept responsibility for undesirable program outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Duty to Responsible Behavior: Autonomy and responsibility in programming incentivize student leaders to hold themselves accountable for student behavior at events.</td>
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Design Inclusive Programming to Engage Targeted Populations

Programming boards leverage different strategies to broaden student participation and include marginalized or underrepresented campus constituencies (e.g., minority students, distance learners) in events. Implementation of inclusive programs increases student turnout and also minimizes social silos and encourages institutional unity.
Strategies for Inclusive Programming

Create Special Programming Boards
Special programming boards represent the unique interests of targeted student populations when considering the content and logistics of weekend events. At **Institution B**, a separate programming board plans weekend programs exclusively for commuter students.

Assign Allocated Group Timeslots
Programming administrators at **Institution A** allocate individual times and days for student cultural groups to implement programming specific to their constituencies. This strategy centralizes logistical planning to avoid overlap and miscommunication.

Incorporate Diversity as a Learning Outcome
Contacts at **Institution C** and **Institution D** indicate that intentionally diverse programming allows all event participants to learn about other cultures and presents an opportunity for personal development among student groups.

Align Program Motivations with Institutional Goals
Programming boards prioritize the social aspects of events; however, contacts at **most institutions** report success directing programming efforts towards defined institutional goals, such as reducing underage drinking. Students and administrators consider program motivation early in the planning process to align event components with desired outcomes.

Intentional Program Development Process

1. **Revise Mission Statement:** Programming board members re-orient event planning to include institutional goals.
2. **Map Potential Outcomes:** Planners create a visual spectrum of event outcomes to understand possible end results from implementation.
3. **Consider Impactful Components:** Planners determine which event components (e.g., timing, location, cost) greatly impact program outcomes.
4. **Complete Planning Process:** Programming board members finalize logistics and implement programs.

Discover Programming Leads through Professional Association Conferences
**Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution C** send student delegations to regional conferences of the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) to identify new programming ideas. Contacts at **Institution C** report discovery of six to eight new performance programs each year from the NACA West regional conference. NACA membership offers the secondary benefits of discounted entertainer rates for large programs and a subscription to the NACA magazine publication.
3) Effective Programming Strategies

Program Types

Invest in Traditional Program Periods for High Turnout

Contacts at all profiled institutions report that a large number of traditional programs occur at approximately the same time each year. For example, the Hawaiian Club Luau program at Institution D has occurred every spring for 25 consecutive years; Institution C’s spring Choral Contest boasts a 91 year record and high attendance rates. While traditional program ideas vary, institutions maintain consistent event timing for such programs (i.e., students know an event will occur in a particular month). Programs with institutional histories and positive reputations experience high student turnout and maintain an established template for success.

Manage Student Expectations of High-Profile Entertainers to Determine Appropriate Choices for Large Programs

Institutions in small, suburban and rural areas encounter challenges planning and implementing programs with big name entertainers. High costs, large space requirements, and entertainer demands for exposure constrain choices for programming boards attempting to hire high-profile performers. Administrators and student leaders must manage student expectations to find appropriate alternatives and implement affordable programs.

Strategies to Manage Student Expectations of Large-Scale Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Problems</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students expect performances by high-profile entertainers</td>
<td>Survey student opinion on a long list of potential entertainers in appropriate price range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students consider only musical performances</td>
<td>Research comedians, hypnotists, magicians, beat poets, and other entertainers to broaden scope of options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students insist on high-cost performer</td>
<td>Allow student government budget decisions to dictate allocations for funding of potentially costly performances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consider a Broad Spectrum of Midsize and Small Event Options

Successful programming remains highly dependent on student demand and interest across profiled institutions. Apart from high-investment traditional events, contacts report success implementing a wide variety of midsize and small weekend program types. Institutions often implement these events as a series if students enjoy the program; for example, students at Institution A can attend Free Movie Fridays 24 times throughout the academic year.

Price and Attendance Range of Non-Traditional Events

- **High Cost**
  - Cosmic bowling nights
  - Mud runs
  - Coffeehouse slam poetry performances
  - Free movie showings
  - Midnight or late-night breakfasts
  - Mr. and Mrs. “Institution” pageants
  - Bingo nights
  - Talent shows
  - Kids’ clubs (e.g., field days)
  - Cooking shows (e.g., microwave cooking)
  - Salsa dances
  - Window painting programs
  - Talent shows
  - Midsize Events
  - Small Events

- **Low Cost**

Reconsider Intellectual Programs on Weekends

Contacts suggest that programs with an overt intellectual focus experience the most success on weekdays, not weekends. Students are less likely to attend intentionally thought-provoking events on weekend due to a desire to relax and interact socially.

Marketing Strategies

**Leverage Digital Resources to Achieve Broad Marketing Reach**

Students engage more actively with social media than any other communication medium, which underlines a clear strategy for program marketers looking to reach broad audiences. Student programming boards maintain active presences on Facebook and Twitter to inform campus constituencies of upcoming events, receive feedback, and post pictures of successful activities.
## Marketing Strategies: Digital Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Marketer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>- Facebook</td>
<td>Student programming board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Twitter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Instagram</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>- Weekly programming emails</td>
<td>Student affairs administrators or student leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Targeted group-specific programming emails</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>- Marketing videos</td>
<td>Student programming board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Event teasers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Vary Outreach Mediums to Capture Student Interest

Although contacts report digital marketing strategies elicit the most student responses, programming boards still market with alternative methods. At smaller suburban and rural institutions, students remain less likely to isolate themselves into individual groups and maintain friends outside of their immediate affiliation groups. Contacts at **Institution C** report success engaging the Greek community to include non-Greek students in weekend programming as well as philanthropic events.

## Marketing Strategies: Non-Digital Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Marketer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper Flyers</td>
<td>- Flyers in public spaces</td>
<td>Student programming board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Bathroom stall programming readers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Program Previews</td>
<td>- Preview event performances</td>
<td>Program planners or performers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-Mouth Marketing</td>
<td>- Student conversations</td>
<td>All students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Solicitation of peer groups by program planners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At Institution A, student program planners roller skated around campus marketing a related program.*
4) Program Assessment

Reception and Feedback

Measure Programming Satisfaction with Survey Results
Administrators at all profiled institutions report gathering online survey data from students about programming efforts on campus, usually on a semester-by-semester basis. At Institution A, program planners distribute paper surveys during some events to obtain student feedback and comments. Contacts at Institution C indicate that survey feedback helps programming boards to quickly and efficiently realize changing trends in student demand, and adjust programs accordingly.

Engage Student Leaders to Understand Program Impact
At Institution C and Institution D, administrators hold in-depth meetings with student leaders to evaluate program outcomes after event completion. Structured reflection assignments allow student leaders to consider program impact and communicate future needs or changes to institution administrations and programming boards.

Reflection Questions to Ask Student Leaders

| The program was inclusive and met the needs of a diverse group of students. |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Slightly Agree | Disagree | Don’t Know |
| [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

| The program fulfilled or exceeded students’ social / educational / cultural expectations and purposes. |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Slightly Agree | Disagree | Don’t Know |
| [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

| Students would attend the program again. |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Slightly Agree | Disagree | Don’t Know |
| [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

| The program’s time and location were ideal given its intended audience and motivation. |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Slightly Agree | Disagree | Don’t Know |
| [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

Survey Results
95%
At Institution D, 95 percent of students attend at least one event and attend an average of four events.

Metrics of Success

Determine Desired Outcomes to Measure Return on Investment
Outcome assessments also vary widely across profiled institutions. Administrators at Institution A, Institution B, and Institution D report that programming entities record attendance at events and consider this number during program success evaluations. At Institution C, administrators and student program planners focus almost exclusively on learning outcomes assessment for both student attendees and planners.

Accurate assessment of program success requires that program planners explicitly define the characteristics of a desired outcome. Variables may include attendance, student enjoyment, cost and time spent, or learning and developmental outcomes.
Evaluate Program Impacts on both Event Planners and Attendees

In student driven programming models, evaluation of program planners allows administrators to support the personal and professional development of student leaders. At Institution C and Institution D, administrators hold structured meetings with program leaders after events to reflect on lessons learned from the planning process. Student program planners at Institution D write three reflection papers per year to evaluate personal development.

Implementing a Dual Evaluation Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric Selection</th>
<th>Student Evaluation</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendee Evaluation</td>
<td>Planners determine program goals and create success metric that aligns with desired outcomes.</td>
<td>Planners collect attendee feedback and measure success based on pre-determined metric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planner Evaluation</td>
<td>Administrators consider developmental and learning goals for student program planners to create success metrics that align with desired outcomes.</td>
<td>Administrators meet with student program planners and discuss learning outcomes; administrators can assign written self-reflection assignments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- Who generates the ideas for student activity programming?
  - How are those who ideate programming involved in implementation?
- What programs or types of programs do institutions offer for students during the weekend?
  - To what extent does weekend student program include commercial partners (e.g., speakers, entertainment vendors)?
- How do other institutions successfully market programs to students?
- What is the primary purpose of weekend programming at other institutions?
  - To what extent do institutions leverage weekend programming to disincentivize underage drinking and attendance at alcohol-related activities?
- What mechanisms exist for students to provide feedback and what metrics do administrators collect to gauge student participant feedback on weekend programming?
  - To what extent do administrators measure cost and attendance of programs in outcome assessments?

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB’s internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- Institutional websites

The Forum interviewed student affairs administrators at small private institutions in non-metropolitan areas.

### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution A</td>
<td>Midwest (City, Small)</td>
<td>3,400/5,300</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution B</td>
<td>Mountain West (City, Midsize)</td>
<td>2,500/3,300</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges and Universities (medium programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution C</td>
<td>Pacific West (City, Small)</td>
<td>1,500 (all undergraduate)</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges (arts &amp; sciences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution D</td>
<td>Pacific West (City, Midsize)</td>
<td>2,100/2,900</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges (arts &amp; sciences)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>