

Homecoming: The Partnership Between Student Activities & Fraternity/Sorority Life

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Let's Get Rowdy, Let's Get Loud! Get Ready to CELEBRATE A GOOD TIME. The vibrancy of campus life is electric, and you can feel it intensify in the weeks leading up to homecoming. One of the best feelings is coming to the end of homecoming week and seeing the students' alumni and community mingling together, having fun, and celebrating school spirit. In this article, a student activities colleague and a fraternity/sorority life colleague will speak on the benefits of having a partnership between these two areas and some of the successes and pitfalls they have encountered with the subject of homecoming.

Collaboration/Partnership

Homecoming wouldn't be possible without collaboration, positive partnerships, and relationships with staff across campus. You need to start early and meet often. You want to be on the same page with dates, themes, marketing, etc. Speaking of themes, make sure to agree on one that sets homecoming participants up for success. While an idea might seem innocuous, is there anyway it could be interpreted as sexist or racist? Homecoming will not be successful if not enough people are at the table. At the same time, too many "cooks in the kitchen" doesn't work well either. Have the people at the table that can make the decisions and enact planning such as student activities/homecoming coordinator, alumni, university marketing, special/large events coordinator, fraternity and sorority life representative, police, and so on. With the theme, you want to make sure you have enough input and support from students, alumni, and sometimes, ultimately, the president of the university. You want it to be exciting and relatable to everyone and exude school spirit. Student involvement and buy-in will make or break your homecoming experience. Some schools have student-run homecomings and others are run by a staff member or staff committee. As you can imagine, the importance of collaborating will directly affect the success of your homecoming.

Successes

Homecoming does well when everyone is on the same page, and everyone helps plan and consistently market the events. We all want each other's events to be successful and share in the tradition and school spirit so it's a win-win for all involved if everyone is supportive and on board! We want current students to partake in school spirit, and we also want alumni to feel proud and supportive and excited to come back and share in the festivities. So when we have some events that cater to everyone, it's a success. Make sure to include the student voice from both the most active organizations and those student groups that aren't as large in numbers.

Thinking of everyone in advance will create a stronger experience. Healthy competition can be fun and exciting and give groups bragging rights until next year. However, plan events that also bring the community together for fun and celebration of the school and avoid having everything focused on points and who's winning. Groups sometimes let the competitions get the best of them, but if we lessen the cost and time it takes to participate in some events then students may not feel as competitive toward others and decide to allow themselves to have fun as opposed to always thinking about winning.

Pitfalls

When unaffiliated students perceive homecoming as just for the fraternity/sorority students they feel excluded or don't feel it is appropriate to participate. Is this true on your campus? If so, make it easy for students to choose their own adventure so it doesn't feel catered to any particular group. With so many events jammed into one week, students often feel exhausted by the end, so sometimes floats or other larger time commitment activities suffer in creativity or work done on them. Homecoming can become over taxing and a burden. But, it is meant to be fun. Pay attention to the schedule to ensure you have events students can just show up and enjoy that don't require more time or effort. Also, remember it's not yours or the committee's homecoming, it is the university and/or college's, and this type of thinking should be at the forefront as you plan.

The Final Event/Celebration

Homecoming is a huge success when everyone is excited, participates, and shows school spirit. Homecoming helps students feel more connected and helps alumni feel re-connected to the university. Additionally, homecoming helps community members appreciate the university as part of their town a little more. Also, seeing faculty and staff participate, we think, helps them appreciate and love the institution that they work for more too. You can't just assume people will show up and engage, so you will need to invite them to participate. Often times, faculty/staff and advisors aren't alums of the institution. If all goes well with homecoming, it can be great publicity for the university/college and the organizations that participate.

Homecoming is not a one size fits all approach nor should it be. It is customizable for your institution, and it is important to take the time to create a well-run program for all to enjoy. In your role you may or may not be the sole person responsible for homecoming. If you aren't, make sure you are at the table and invite others to collaborate and be a part of the process. After all, it is a university/college event.