

Annual Report to Senate on Orientation 2012 Senate Orientation Activities Review Board (SOARB) January 2013

Board Members:

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Reports of the Senate Orientation Activities Review Board (SOARB) have been, primarily, based on qualitative feedback acquired through observation and reporting by organizers and Orientation partners. SOARB recognizes a need to also provide relevant quantitative data to help us better compare improvements year over year. More than 1,000 student volunteers in addition to 1,000 student staff contributed to the success of Orientation 2012. Congratulations to all Faculty and Group leaders, Faculty student councils, Residence student staff, Residence student councils, move-in day volunteers and members of the Orientation Roundtable for warmly welcoming the class of 2016.

This year, over 3,500 incoming students participated in six days of Residence, FYNIRS (First Year Not In Residence Students), Faculty and/or NEWTS (New, Exchange, Woohoo, & Transfer Students) Orientation activities. The budget, excluding Residence Orientation, was over \$500,000. The cost to each participant varied by program, ranging from \$50 to \$210. The cost of Residence Orientation is included in Residence fees. Besides fees, funding is provided by the various student societies and sponsorship from local and national businesses.

The current mandate of the Board directs that "SOARB will report to the Senate in November on its review of the Orientation just past and on its recommendations for the next year." This directive does not allow time to

incorporate data from surveys on Orientation into the yearly report. SOARB therefore requests that the Senate support that the yearly report on Orientation will take be presented in January of each year on the Orientation of the previous September.

Update from 2011 Recommendations.

- **SOARB will review the Goals of Orientation and attach meaningful, actionable and measurable objectives to those Goals. These goals and objectives should be communicated to Organizers by February 1, 2012 in order to be implemented for Orientation 2012.**

The Review of Goals and Objectives took place and was presented to Orientation organizers at a meeting November 23, 2011. Each of the current 5 Goals was broken down into strategies (broad approaches) and objectives (measurable task.) Additionally, organizers were provided with sample tactics, or tools, to meet those objectives. The Board recognizes the need to further review the goals and objectives of Orientation, as approved by Senate, and modify the language of those Goals and Objectives to better facilitate both qualitative and quantitative measurements of success. Furthermore, during the review process the Board recognized a need to further refine the language of the current Goals and Objectives.

- **SOARB expects that low-energy/less physical events will be organized with as much thought, structure and intention to engage as high-energy/physical ones. The Board recommends that each Orientation committee plan their 2012 programme to provide a plurality of options for events that are not defined by willingness or ability to participate.**

SOARB witnessed little change in the Faculty Orientation programs regarding this recommendation and the 2012 survey results indicate that 29% of respondents called their Orientation program “extremely” or “very” physically demanding. The Board acknowledges its responsibility to better clarify and communicate this recommendation to Faculty/Group Orientation leaders and event signatories in order to achieve events that are inclusive of all levels of not only ability but willingness. The Board will be implementing a system to track the percentage of events that are classified as highly physical with the objective of achieving balance in each overall Orientation programme.

- **SOARB recommends that Orientation Roundtable develop a method of event submission which ensures that risk assessment happens**

throughout the planning process. This process must be in place by March 2012, to ensure its implementation for Orientation 2012.

An online event management tool was developed in the Spring of 2012. Due to the need for more time to test the Tool, it was decided that the Tool would be finalized by March 2013 for implementation during the Fall 2013 Orientation Week planning process.

- **SOARB notes that previous success obtaining an exemption should not be considered a guarantee of future success. It is the preference of the Board that Orientation organizers adjust planning rather than seek exemptions.**

To clarify policy, and apply consistent standards across all events, SOARB reviewed several years' worth of exemptions and classified those exemptions by type. The Board explored whether or not the underlying reason for the prohibition, within existing policy, was still relevant and necessary. Organizers were very receptive to this recommendation and many fewer exemption requests were received. Subsequently SOARB affirmed existing prohibitions relating to 'mud and water slides', while adding new policy to address start times on the first day of Faculty/Group Orientation as well as the voluntary fitness activities that take place during PheKin Orientation at Camp Oconto. SOARB retains the perspective that Orientation organizers should adjust planning rather than seek exemptions.

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:

Comments on Orientation 2012

Orientation Week 2012 can be considered a success; over 80% of respondents to the Orientation 2012 survey rated their experience as either "excellent" or "good." All Orientation partners, student organizers and campus services should be commended for their efforts and ability to manage external factors. Queen's Athletics and Recreation, Queen's Security and Queen's Environmental Health and Safety are especially thanked for their assistance to ORT in relocating events when severe weather became an issue on Saturday night.

The recommendations that follow flow from the participant survey, feedback from Orientation planners and observations from Orientation partners and SOARB.

Based on the inclement weather that was present during the last portion of Orientation Week 2012, it has come to the Board's attention that there is no clear, centralized protocol in place for when weather is a limiting factor at events. Contingency planning for back-up events at indoor venues is labour and resource intensive and not financially feasible for many groups to integrate into their planning process - particularly smaller groups and faculties.

As the University continues to increase enrollment, while maintaining its current physical infrastructure, Orientation Week organizers rely more heavily on outdoor venues with larger capacities. This subsequently increases the potential number of cancelled events due to inclement weather. If this pattern continues then it is only a matter of time until Orientation Week is significantly impacted by inclement weather resulting in the loss of a large percentage of event programming.

- **SOARB recommends that a communication tree be formalized, including identifying a point person for assessing risk and liability, in response to emergent circumstances such as inclement weather. The Board stresses the importance of having a balance, of both indoor and outdoor events, over each day and the entire week so that, in the event of inclement weather, some meaningful, planned programming can still take place. The Board directs the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs to work, in collaboration with ORT and Event Services, to develop policy that maximizes space flexibility without financially burdening Orientation week programming.**

One of the primary goals of Orientation Week is to introduce first year students to academic life, resources, and expectations at Queen's. The University's academic plan directs that Queen's must provide all students, regardless of their chosen program or discipline, with core competencies and skills. Survey respondents placed a high value on academic preparation. For example the survey found that 87% of respondents valued "learning how to manage my time effectively". Only 40% of respondents agreed that Orientation was successful in accomplishing this objective. Other areas of discrepancy within the survey are "registering for classes" and "knowing what to expect academically"

- **SOARB recommends that Faculties and groups invest as much thought, energy, and planning into achieving academic as non-academic goals. Under the guidance of the Office of the VP and Dean of Student Affairs, and in accordance with the 5 pillars of the recently developed Queen's Academic Plan, the respective Dean's offices,**

and campus units that support academic transition and success, will develop a list of academic priorities that must be delivered during Orientation Week. The delivery of the established priorities will be through a structure suited to the needs of each Faculty or group.

SOARB recognizes that every official Orientation Week event, thanks to the planning conducted by the student organizers and a thorough approval process, mitigates risk to a minimum, is run in a safe manner, and takes into account accessibility and inclusivity. However, it has come to the attention of the Board that the time between events is, often, not planned with a similar level of forethought. In the worst cases this lack of planning may leave participants exposed to unnecessary risk. At other times unstructured intervals between events results in leaders repeatedly defaulting to cheers to engage students. It is not the intention of the Board to prohibit cheering between events but rather to challenge organizers to consciously link interval activities to the objectives of the next event.

- **SOARB recommends that student organizers plan, in writing, all intervals, between events as well as travel to and from events, in order to ensure the safety of student participants as well as capitalize on opportunities to enhance their programme. While SOARB recognizes that event forms already have a portion dedicated to travel, it is important that organizers recognize the importance of this section and properly plan entrance/exit points, sufficient travel time, and exogenous factors such as traffic and intersections. SOARB recommends that ORT increase the current scope of risk assessment training and provide some level of training on this topic to all Orientation Week leaders. SOARB would also like to see appropriate, intentional transitions between events in order to properly set the tone for, and support the objectives of, the event that is about to take place.**

The overarching goal of Orientation Week is “To make new students comfortable in their academic, social and environmental contexts.” The survey found that 83% of respondents valued “getting to know one faculty or staff member that I can turn to if I have questions or concerns”. Only 56% of respondents agreed that Orientation was successful in accomplishing this objective. The Board recognizes an opportunity to strengthen relationships on and off campus by fostering a community inclusive of not only fellow students but also staff, faculty, alumni and community members.

- **SOARB recommends that greater consideration is given to including interactions with staff, faculty, alumni and local community members in a variety of Orientation events. The Board expects that staff and faculty are invited to a range of events, not only those with an academic focus.**