

Annual Report to Senate on Orientation 2008
Senate Orientation Activities Review Board (SOARB)
November 2008

Board Members:

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B. Barnett, B.A. '09
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ASUS must facilitate communication among Orientation partners to ensure full access for all eligible participants.

Applied Science:

The efforts of the Applied Science student leaders were integral in the overall reduction of interfaculty rivalry and negative cheers during Orientation Week. As well, Applied Science made commendable efforts to use more environmentally-friendly materials. SOARB recognizes the potential for positive upper-year involvement in Orientation; however, the involvement of anonymous students who are not accountable for their actions may undermine the safety and goals of Orientation. It is recommended that Applied Science work to minimize this harmful involvement, particularly on the first day's events. As well, SOARB encourages Applied Science reconsider the innuendos suggested by some of their cheers and events, particularly those involving Nursing, which are subversive to the inclusive nature of Orientation Week.

Commerce:

SOARB is happy to report that Commerce Orientation upheld the terms of its two-year probation at this half-way point. In particular, SOARB commends the Commerce student leaders in their efforts to re-design the historically problematic 'family face-off' event, so that upper-year involvement was controlled and constructive. The Commerce Orientation leaders were also very cooperative and eager to work with SOARB to meet the terms of their probation. However, SOARB is aware of reports of upper-year students 'kidnapping' first-year students to off-campus locations to consume alcohol. While it is recognized that these were unsanctioned events that were not organized or condoned by student leaders, we encourage more proactive efforts by Commerce Orientation leaders to identify and terminate such activities in the future.

Concurrent Education (Con-Ed):

Con-Ed Orientation was notable for its high participation rate, well-organized events, and efforts to make events inclusive and accessible. Con-Ed Orientation provides a model of controlled interaction with upper-year students and positive messages communicated to students. A continued concern, however, is the tradition of 'gooping' students with silly string, which has harmful environmental impacts. On a similar note, while Con-Ed Orientation is small, it is still recommended that efforts be taken to minimize the environmental impact of Orientation.

Nursing:

Nursing Orientation provided a welcoming environment for new students, and a feeling of community with upper-year students. As well, along with the efforts of Applied Science and Commerce Orientation leaders, the Nursing student leaders responded to SOARB's concerns about 'mock exams' by seeking to minimize levels of anxiety among students. SOARB appreciated Nursing Orientation's efforts to include a charitable component in their program; however, the success of the Easter Seal's 'Car Smash' was questionable in terms of environmental health and safety, public relations, and its low level of student engagement with the community. Furthermore, SOARB has raised concerns about implied messages in events and cheers that undermine the goals of Orientation. In particular, it is suggested that Nursing

review the messages regarding gender and sexuality expressed in its interaction with Applied Science and the ‘optional’ costumes on the first day.

Physical and Health Education/ Kinesiology (PHE/KIN)

Over the summer, it was discovered that the Orientation Handbook that was sent to incoming students featured images and event themes that perpetuated harmful cultural stereotypes of various nationalities. In response, the Faculty of Arts and Science issued a letter of apology to all recipients of the handbook, and the handbook and events were re-designed. Fortunately, there were no complaints to the Faculty about this material, and during Orientation, few students expressed concern about what they had read. SOARB and the Faculty of Arts and Science recognize that this issue was due to a gap in the procedures and criteria for approving Orientation material that is distributed—while three actors must approve of a handbook, there is confusion about what should be looked for. As a long-term response, the Campus Activities Commissioner is reviewing the procedural guidelines for approval, and SOARB is working to improve communication to Deans and Faculty Society Presidents about their roles and responsibilities as those who authorize events and materials.

Looking to the actual Orientation Week, PHE/KIN Orientation was again a well-attended and positively-received week. Particular strengths of this faculty Orientation are the positive upper-year student involvement and the Camp Oconto experience, which is well-organized, safe and fun. SOARB had concerns, however, with the quality of PHE/KIN’s charity component—a charity sports tournament—in terms of its lack of outreach to the community, potential for accessibility issues, and the financial burden placed on student participants.

Computing:

Computing Orientation continued to provide a warm welcome for incoming students, fostering a strong sense of community within the small faculty. A particular strength of Computing Orientation is the strong involvement of upper-year students and faculty members. Computing Orientation partially participates in Arts and Science Orientation events. It is recommended that a liaison be appointed to Arts and Science and ORT to facilitate smoother collaboration.

General Observations, Recommendations, and Updates:

Motion on Leader Training:

In an effort to improve the hiring and training process of student leaders, SOARB passed a motion requiring all faculty Orientation executives to receive training, organized by the Campus Activities Commission of the AMS and the ORT Coordinator, on the goals of Orientation, anti-oppression, and criteria for hiring student leaders prior to the actual hiring process. This motion seeks to address the different awareness levels across faculties of such issues. This training is expected to take place in late November.

Updated Terms of Reference:

Senate passed the updated Terms of Reference for SOARB in October. These changes bring the Terms of Reference up to date with changes to SOARB’s purpose and role in Orientation that have been passed by Senate in recent years.

Issues of Concern Across Faculties:

While Orientation 2008 was generally very successful, there were some issues of concern across multiple faculties. These include: negative and uncontrolled upper-year involvement; innuendos and cheers that undermine the goals of inclusiveness and appropriateness in Orientation; and flaws in the leader hiring and training process so that leaders are not fully aware of the stated goals of Orientation and their responsibility to embody these. SOARB recommends that ORT and individual faculty Orientation executives make concerted efforts to address these concerns early on in the process of preparing for Orientation 2009, i.e., before leader hiring.

Changed Concert Location to Fort Henry:

Due to problems receiving a noise by-law exemption from the City of Kingston, the all-faculty concert was moved from the Miller Hall parking lot to Fort Henry. This change introduced students to a historical landmark off-campus, and the open admission to non-students promoted positive relations between students and the wider Kingston community. SOARB recommends that this location be continued in future years given the annual difficulty of obtaining a noise by-law exemption. However, SOARB recommends that ORT work with Student Constables and Queen's First Aid to reach out to external partners for better collaboration on issues of security and safety for all attendees.

Improved Communication Between SOARB and Various Orientation Bodies:

SOARB continues to identify difficulties in communication between various actors in Orientation planning. In particular, there appears to be a lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of deans and faculty society presidents who approve Orientation events and materials. In order to address this gap in the Orientation planning process, SOARB will work to prepare guidelines that clearly outline the roles of various positions and bodies. This information will also be communicated in person through meetings with SOARB members. In the future, SOARB recommends ORT, faculty society presidents, and deans closely examine Orientation documents, including Spirit with Responsibility, and proactively contact SOARB with any questions or uncertainties.

Progress on Recommendations from SOARB's 2007 Report to Senate:

1. *That the Commerce Executive on Orientation (CEO) follows the terms of probation for severely violating Orientation objectives at an event.*

SOARB worked with Commerce Orientation to implement the terms of probation, and is happy to report that at the mid-way point, the terms are being met. SOARB has communicated to incoming Commerce leaders ways in which they can improve upon Orientation 2008 so that terms are not just met, but fulfilled as successfully as possible for 2009.

2. *That ORT work to organize a more valuable, engaging and comprehensive training to prepare students for their role as leaders and ambassadors of the University.*

SOARB heard from several faculty Orientation executives that leader training in 2008 improved considerably upon the previous years' models. Of particular note was the effort to make training sessions

as directly relevant to Orientation leaders' roles as possible, and to provide a more intimate, engaging atmosphere by dividing up faculties. Unfortunately, some faculties were reported to have behaved in a disrespectful manner during training; however, SOARB was pleased that the faculty executives took this matter seriously and quickly rectified the situation. SOARB continues to have concerns about the quality of leader selection and training. To this end, we have passed a motion requiring all faculty Orientation executives to receive training, organized by ORT, prior to hiring student leaders, so that they share a common understanding about the proper goals of Orientation that should be imparted upon student leaders immediately after selection. SOARB also encourages ORT to continue to revise leader training and seek out innovative ways to make it as effective as possible.

3. *That the hiring of Orientation leaders, chairs and executives be a transparent process involving a committee of non-partisan individuals*

SOARB recognizes that some small improvements have been made to the various hiring processes. During 2009, SOARB will compile information on hiring policies across Orientation committees and make a recommendation.

4. *That planning committees and ORT make concerted effort to incorporate more comprehensive security measures to prevent the presence of unauthorized, often intoxicated, individuals*

SOARB noted few events where security, particularly the presence of unauthorized persons, was a major concern. Where such incidents continue to be problematic, SOARB has identified these events with faculty Orientation executives and encourages concerted effort to mitigate this negative presence, and better communication with Student Constables to inform them of any foreseen occurrences.

5. *That gender vs gender, group vs individual, and inter-faculty rivalry be critically evaluated and where it does not promote the goals of Orientation, eliminated.*

SOARB noted a conscious effort across all faculties to eliminate the use of negative cheers at other faculties and to build camaraderie by 'building themselves up' as opposed to 'bringing others down.' SOARB did receive isolated reports of harmful cheers against other faculties by some individual leaders, and thus encourages faculty executives to stress to leaders the harm these cheers cause.

6. *That each Orientation committee actively review each event plan to accommodate individuals with specific requirements of physical accessibility.*

Improved accessibility was one of ORT's specific goals for Orientation 2008, and SOARB observed the successful inclusion of students with various physical accessibility needs across faculties. SOARB particularly commends the efforts of faculties such as Con-Ed to proactively plan on how to adapt events to make them accessible to students of different abilities, prior to learning about the specific needs of first-year students. SOARB recommends that this 'best practice' of event-planning to promote accessibility be shared across all faculties, so that events do not have to be adjusted 'on the spot' when issues arise.