

Getting the Most Out of Conferences

Student Government leaders at the University of North Dakota use their "Homework Sheet" as a networking tool

by Eric Hastie

Do you want to get more out of attending your next leadership conference than just jet lag? Follow the example set by Student Government officers from the **University of North Dakota**. These savvy leaders wanted to take advantage of the large amount of idea swapping that occurs at these events, so Berly Nelson, '00-01 SG president, developed a "Homework Sheet." This document is a way for officers to bring up topics of interest and learn how other schools are tackling similar issues.

"UND has been going to the Conference On Student Government Associations (COSGA) for several years, but after going to the 2000 conference, I felt the most beneficial aspect of the conference was exchanging ideas with other Student Governments," Nelson says. "Comparing similar problems and projects is, in my opinion, the most beneficial thing."

The sheet supplies members with a list of important campus topics and serves as a springboard for delegates to communicate about the issues with other SG members. To get some ideas, Nelson "would start talking to another delegate and eventually slip in a question about one of the issues," he also brought up topics during the workshops in order to get more input. "Most of [what we learned] we just discussed among our delegation," Nelson says. "Hopefully in the future, if continued, responses/feedback will be better documented from firsthand encounters."

Nelson's "Homework Sheet," includes the following list of topics.

- Find out what other schools have for budgets.
- Find out if other schools pay their execs and maybe even howmuch.
- Find out what their schools' SG/SAs are composed of (structure), Senate too.
- Find out if and what other SGs do for a textbook buyback.
- Find out how much their parking permits are and if they have parking ramps that students can park in.
- Find out if they have a fitness center on campus for student use and if they have to pay directly/indirectly to use it.
- Find out about their student fees and how their SG's get money.
- Find out if they have big concerts on campus and what bands.
- Find out if they vote online and what their turnout is.
- Find out if they have campaign spending limits and how much a normal exec campaign costs.
- Find out what their relationship with the school paper is.
- Find out what kind of stuff they have in their Student Union.
- Find out what their alcohol policy is.
- Find out how they register for classes.
- Find out how they inform students on issues, events, etc.
- Find out what they do on a statewide level (lobby, legislature, etc.).
- Find out if they have a campus escort service, shuttle bus, etc.
- Find out if they have an exclusive contract with a pop/soda company.
- Find out how many student seats they get at sporting events.
- Find out if they have a 24-hour study facility.
- Find out if they have student busing to athletic events.
- Find out about internet/Ethernet connection on/off campus.
- Find out what they do during homecoming.
- Find out if they have any special traditions at their school.
- Find out what the biggest issues for their SG/SAs.

After delegates returned from COSGA, the SG applied their newfound knowledge to programs on the UND campus. "The first example that comes to mind where we did use the feedback from other schools

was in expanding our campus safety shuttle/escort service," Nelson says. "That was something we had been working on for about a year, and it was culminating around the COSGA conference time, so we were able to use some suggestions from other schools."

Nelson also e-mailed leaders from the other schools who attended COSGA. "I've been working on compiling all the results of the "Homework Sheet," as it was modified a little and sent over e-mail," Nelson says. "The response was pretty good, between 20 to 30 schools."

UND isn't the only school to use other conference attendees as a resource, **Cleveland State University** borrowed an idea from COSGA to form a House of Representatives. "The House of Representatives is an idea that the current president of SGA brought back from COSGA," says SGA Vice President Ruth Ramos. After deciding to help develop the House, Ramos e-mailed all the COSGA participants. "Even if some schools didn't have a House, it was still nice to hear the encouragement from different universities across the nation," Ramos says. "I encourage all universities to attend COSGA. There's so much information to take advantage of and take to your home university and implement."

In the future, UND plans on modifying the sheet, but not drastically. "I don't see any major changes for next year," says Matthew Brown, UND president. "I think I will attempt to focus on questions targeting schools more similar to our size, funding, structures, etc-." Nelson started the sheet to help the SG more effectively create new ideas or adopt programs for their school, and if they focus on schools of the same stature, they can accomplish this more easily. "The point here is to implement the programs on our campus," Brown says.

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