

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: SERVICE WITHIN NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

Source: Angelina Hamilton Broderick, MCC AmeriCorps*VISTA, Eastern Michigan University, 2004-2005

Issue(s) Being Addressed:

How do you institute a day of service with new student orientation?

Actions to Consider:

Offering a service component within new student orientation or welcome week, can help students become engaged civically and gain a more global perspective. It allows students to make the connection between their new campus and community, and gives them the opportunity to see how the institution and the community are linked.

Overview:

Eastern Michigan University has included a service component within new student orientation for the last 8 years. "Community Plunge" provides students a unique opportunity to explore the community.

New Student Orientation (known as Fusion at EMU), is a four day event with a different theme each day: Family, Academic, Collegiate and Community Fusion, where VISION (Volunteers Incorporating Service Into Our Neighborhoods) takes center stage. Community Plunge sends off around 200 new students into the community. When their service is complete they receive "Ypsi" bucks which are accepted as cash at various vendors in our historic Depot Town. This allows students to further "plunge" into the community.

The Event:

Community Plunge takes place from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm. New students gather at a central location to meet, sign in, receive a t-shirt and grab something to eat. Students are placed at sites based on their interests and are given a chance to meet the rest of their team and site leaders. Participants receive a welcome from the Vice President of Student Affairs as well as the Director of Campus Life and the VISION Student Coordinator. The groups are sent off no later than 9:30 and return no later than 12:30. Work that is usually done in that time frame consists of smaller tasks that can be accomplished in a two hour time frame. Some examples of past service includes: landscaping for a Habitat for Humanity house, landscaping for a child development center, work with a community garden, river or park clean up, prepping child centers for their upcoming session, mailings, painting murals, work with animal sanctuary or humane societies, and work at the area library.

Key Components:

- Determine community sites at least three months in advance
- Send a letter to prospective community sites and use a form for them to confirm their participation
- Follow up with phone calls at least a month in advance and then again a week before to confirm and reconfirm
- Look for work that can be done within the time frame allotted and that is near the institution
- Reserve transportation according to the guidelines at your institution
- Make sure to have a gathering location and order food for your participants
- Work with new student orientation to send out sign up forms to new students
- Allow new students to sign up on-line
- Use upper class student site leaders for each community site
- Order t-shirts for participants in order to establish unity and provide an incentive