

Final Report

Report of the Committee on the Freshman Year Social Experience Summer 2004

Charge to the Committee

The President charged the Committee on the Freshman Year Social Experience to do the following:

The Committee on the Freshman Social Experience will examine the ‘ignition’ experiences and other activities, formal and informal, that are critical to good acclimation for students in their first year of residence at Princeton. These experiences, which complement the learning that takes place in classrooms and laboratories, help prepare students for the challenges and setbacks they may encounter as they make the transition from high school to college and from adolescence to adulthood. The Committee is asked to examine the following topics but is also free to identify and explore other issues that may emerge:

Issues to be examined:

- Prematriculation experiences (Outdoor Action, Community Action, International Student Pre-Orientation)
- Orientation Week education and socialization
- Role of Greek organizations and eating clubs in freshman social life
- Identities established by subcommunities while integrating into the larger campus community
- Leadership opportunities, including class government and residential college opportunities

The Committee may reaffirm our current practices in these areas or make recommendations for improvement to the President and the Vice President for Campus Life.

Membership is to include faculty, undergraduate students, and administrative representatives from various Campus Life offices. [A list of members is attached as Appendix A.]

The Work of the Committee

The committee met as a group eight times, December 2003-May 2004. In addition, three sub-committees were formed and met numerous times in order to gather information that would help determine whether the ignition experiences – before, during, and after Orientation – actually accomplish institutional objectives. From the very first meeting, Committee members clearly defined the central question: how to give freshmen an

understanding of the University's standards regarding respect for others, community, diversity, and behavior while integrating truly social opportunities to find friends, mentors, and communities where they feel at home. They also acknowledged as a priority the need for opportunities for freshmen to make connections with upperclass students.

The committee first developed a set of questions to pursue regarding pre-Orientation activities (Outdoor Action, Community Action, fall sports teams, International Pre-Orientation). Committee members focused on early bonding in these groups of students and identified the need to find balance between comfort and challenge – between community building and the potential liabilities of self-segregation – and to maintain fluidity among groups. As one committee member put it, “If people’s affinities don’t change or expand while they’re at Princeton, we’ve failed as an institution.”

Committee members then generated questions to ask about the nonacademic events that take place during Orientation and early in the first year, as well as the educational (but nonacademic) programs that take place during Orientation: *Reflections on Diversity* and *Sex on a Saturday Night*. The committee here too recognized a need for balance as freshmen seek to create class identity and to interact with the other classes. Student members of the committee made it clear that what is missing in Orientation is a sense of “school spirit” and time to meet and socialize with other classmates.

Finally, in this first stage of committee work, members developed questions about student organizations, leadership opportunities, subcommunities, the role of fraternities and sororities, and the eating clubs. The committee noted that freshmen lack accurate information about the eating clubs and Greek organizations, in particular, even while fraternities and sororities recruit actively during Orientation

Committee members formed three subcommittees: Pre-Orientation, Orientation, and Organizations and Activities. These subcommittees then entered into the information-gathering process, which consisted of interviews and focus groups. [A list of issues raised and questions generated by the committee is attached as Appendix B. Not all questions are answered in this report, which focuses only on those areas where committee members recommended improvements, changes, or new initiatives.]

The Subcommittee on Pre-Orientation met with a sampling of students from all pre-Orientation activities (fall athletics, Outdoor Action, Community Action and International Pre-orientation), as well as with students who did **not** participate in those activities. They focused on the degree to which these experiences helped students bond to one another and ease the transition into the Princeton community.

The Subcommittee on Orientation Week planned and hosted focus groups in the residential colleges. They identified five broad questions, as well as in-depth follow-up questions. The five basic questions were:

1) Was there a particular moment or experience during Orientation Week that made you feel you could find a place for yourself in the Princeton community?

- 2) Conversely, did anything happen during the first week that made you feel especially alienated?
- 3) What kinds of interactions did you have with upperclass students (excluding RAs, RCAs and MAAs)?
- 4) How did you spend your time that first week when you were not involved in formal Orientation activities?
- 5) How well do you think Orientation served you as an incoming freshman?

The Subcommittee on Student Organizations and Activities met to identify goals, data sources, and methods to acquire that data. Among the goals were 1) identifying ways to encourage students to have multiple identities; 2) identifying how, where, and when sub-communities form, and determining whether these are positive or negative; 3) ensuring that the freshman social experience is inclusive in the sense that all students are given the same opportunities to join or not join an activity/group/etc.; 4) creating an environment that encourages students to take social risks in the same way that they are encouraged to take intellectual risks; 5) channeling the capabilities and enthusiasm of students who were leaders in high school but who decide not to pursue elected positions at Princeton into new areas that broaden their college experience; and 6) providing opportunities for students to join ongoing activities that might be wholly recreational in places other than Prospect Street. The sub-committee attempted to identify high school leaders who are not pursuing their high school interests at Princeton, students who are involved in multiple extra-curricular areas, juniors and seniors who are now happy but who as freshmen were a bit lost, students who have participated in the Black Student Union's Leadership and Mentoring Program (LAMP) and juniors and seniors who elected not to join a club but to have independent dining arrangements. Individual subcommittee members met with focus groups that included the following constituencies:

- Co-op members and independent students
- Eating Club members
- Members of fraternities and sororities
- Athletes
- Leaders of student organizations
- Groups of freshmen selected at random
- Resident and minority affairs advisers
- Administrators

Findings and Preliminary Recommendations

Pre-Orientation

Members of the Pre-Orientation Subcommittee identified a number of issues that need to be addressed.

First, freshmen complain about the overload of information that they receive over the summer. Since no single office has the full picture of what is mailed to incoming students over the summer, it would be useful to develop a comprehensive set of summer mailings

so the dean's offices could review, and perhaps better organize, what goes out to freshmen. Posting the materials on a website after hard copies are mailed would also provide backup for students and parents who are concerned about missing something.

Now that Princeton e-mail addresses for the entering class are available on or about July 1, it makes it easier than in past years for roommates to establish early communication with one another. Students can share phone numbers, instant messenger addresses, etc. if they wish. While the *Student Guide to Princeton* is updated annually and now appears on the incoming class website, it would benefit from a thorough review to ensure that we are providing students with the most valuable practical advice about negotiating the campus well in advance of arrival.

Students who have siblings or former high school friends at Princeton or whose relatives are alumni seem to arrive on campus with a built-in sense of belonging. These "connections" seem to give them a strong social advantage over the student who arrives knowing no one. Interaction among focus group participants was, at times, poignant; some students expressed confidence that they would "fit" because they knew that four or five students a year from their high schools attended Princeton and were happy and successful here. Others, in contrast, felt anxious and uncertain because they had never known anyone who attended Princeton. The gap between these two experiences was striking and those who felt more comfortable and confident were often surprised to learn that some of their classmates had a different experience. Encouraging more regional gatherings during the summer months which could provide freshmen with casual opportunities to meet other students might ameliorate this problem. Already some alumni groups or parents of current students plan informal picnics or other events and invite upperclass students to serve as hosts. The students who have attended these gatherings report that they are very valuable and provide an important and reassuring connection to Princeton for them and for their families.

Students often arrive with high expectations about new friendships with roommates and are sometimes disappointed to discover that their roommates have separate, pre-formed groups of friends (e.g., teammates, high school friends, those who break away early to join sororities or fraternities). This can lead to some students feeling isolated or left out.

Regarding specific pre-Orientation programs, the subcommittee heard the following:

In **Outdoor Action**, with ten students per group, each group in a different location, participants get to know each other very well in a short period of time. There is overwhelming consensus that for those who participate (upwards of 600 students), OA is a highly positive experience. Strong bonds are forged as students work hard together and must trust and rely on each other. The OA leader is key to the experience. As an older student who knows Princeton well, the leader can connect group members with many other Princeton students once they return to campus. The OA dance, held the night participants return to campus, is a tremendous success. However, freshmen who did not participate in OA, but who arrive the day after OA participants have returned from their

trips, report feeling envious of the closeness they see among OA participants and, initially, feel somewhat excluded.

The **Community Action** dynamic is quite different. Groups are somewhat larger (fifteen to twenty students) and they work on separate community service projects in Trenton, painting homes, cleaning parks, for example. While the experience of the Community Action participants is positive and they derive many of the same benefits as their OA peers, many students feel that CA's "image" is a less popular one than OA's. Even in publicity materials, CA seems to have a much lower profile and seems to some like an afterthought, in comparison to the large amount of information provided about OA. Some students have the perception -- albeit an inaccurate one -- that CA is for students who are not physically capable of participating in OA. Occasionally, there are even skits by campus groups that parody CA and can add to the perception that it is "uncool." Freshmen reported that even as a visiting "prospective" during April Hosting they heard that CA is "less cool" than OA. The Committee is persuaded of the value of this program and sees this more as a marketing issue than a matter of substance.

Fall athletes face a tough challenge in meeting others on campus and in participating in campus activities. (This does not seem to be the case for winter and spring athletes.) Fall athletes are immediately involved with their teams and, understandably, have less time to integrate more fully into their residential colleges or into other social or extra-curricular activities until their season is completed. However, some do not feel the need to branch out since they comfortably identify with their team. Many report that they are also held to strict constraints since coaches forbid drinking and partying while the team is in season and they are therefore less likely to attend Prospect Street or other parties where they might socialize with non-athletes. In addition, away games, early practices, curfews and physical fatigue after practices are factors that are likely to influence the athlete's interest in socializing with others during the season. Bonding with teammates appears to be even stronger than that which occurs within OA groups since teams remain together for the entire season. They work hard together in close proximity and feel very interconnected. They do have an opportunity to meet other people through their upperclass teammates.

Students who do not participate in any pre-Orientation activities give various reasons for their choice, as follows: desire to spend that last week with family and friends; need to finish summer job commitments; re: OA, dislike of camping, expense of camping equipment, inconvenience of bringing the equipment to campus, intimidating physical criteria, concerns about spending time with strangers; re: CA, stigma attached to being "uncool," perception of the program as the thing to do if you cannot do OA, preference not to spend last free week doing community service on account of having participated in community service in high school, etc. Many students who did not participate in pre-Orientation programs say that it is daunting to see groups who bonded in these activities eating and socializing together in the residential colleges. Some feel left out, initially, and many also feel envious of students who met upperclass students in pre-Orientation activities.

Orientation

Focus groups and interviews raised many issues about Orientation Week. Most students feel that the Orientation schedule is overwhelming. Freshmen report wanting more unstructured time to get to know their roommates and their hallmates. They report that there are too many “passive” events at which they are expected to sit for extended periods of time and listen to others speak.

The students in these focus groups voiced the same concerns we heard in the pre-Orientation focus groups -- that students who have classmates from high school or siblings who attend Princeton are much better informed about the social aspects of campus life than those who arrive knowing no one. Orientation is only partially successful in addressing this information gap. This suggests a need for more informal mentoring by upperclass students.

Most RAs, MAAs and RCAs are clearly working hard to close this information gap but freshmen find the adviser experience variable. Some advisers are seen as either disengaged or “party liners.” While, occasionally, an adviser may seem uninterested in his or her advisees, most are quite dedicated and receive positive evaluations from their freshmen advisees. However, advisers must often engage in a tough balancing act; they shoulder “front line” responsibility for communicating community values about respect, diversity, personal responsibility and accountability and must also, on occasion, push their freshmen charges to challenge long-standing assumptions. At the same time, they are the most visible connection to the social experience and freshmen often have high expectations that advisers will be their most important social resource. Increased interaction with more upperclass students would provide more options and put less of a burden on the advisers to be all things to all people.

During Orientation, the advisers are also charged with facilitating three fairly challenging discussions as follow-ups to mandatory Orientation events. Students sometimes feel that advisers force them to go to events when they would prefer more social time. Some freshmen report feeling uncomfortable or at least cautious about fully participating in some of these Orientation small group discussions. They feel anxious about revealing their attitudes, values and beliefs for fear their classmates may judge them prematurely. Advisers have the hard job of simultaneously creating an atmosphere that is welcoming and hospitable to everyone while respecting different values, lifestyles, attitudes. There are no obvious responses to this tension and it may simply be a necessary condition of the adviser role. We should continue to examine ways to support the advisers in their work through training and ongoing assessment of the adviser program.

Organizations that hold Orientation events are good connecting points for various subcommunities. For example, The Center for Jewish Life and LGBT activities are well attended. RAs are critical in bringing students to these events and making them aware of the resources available, particularly in the Centers.

Some athletes feel pulled between spending time with their team and attending Orientation events. Those who feel this way are not clear where that tension comes from,

but they develop the impression that they do not have to attend Orientation and that they would benefit more from bonding with their upperclass teammates.

Most of the class attends the majority or all of the required Orientation events, although there are some who report attending few or none. Many students report that the events in Richardson Auditorium become a blur. After Orientation week is over, many students cannot distinguish among them.

Some students mistakenly perceive that, if you miss the Activities Fair, you have missed the opportunity to become involved in a group or join an organization. A second Student Activities Fair could be offered in December for students who failed to identify an organization or activity that appealed to them or were too worried about the pace and schedule of their academic lives to engage in extracurricular activities in the first term.

Many freshmen report that they had misconceptions about eating clubs and misunderstood the “rules” about visiting clubs and what was expected of them. While the clubs are organized as dining and social options for upperclassmen, it is commonly understood that freshmen frequent the clubs, invited or not. Upperclass club members voiced concerns similar to those expressed by freshmen and urged us to consider ways to provide accurate information to freshmen. It is problematic to wait until the sophomore year as students begin the bicker and sign-in process to share information about club policies and expectations. We understand the Interclub Council is exploring a “visitors’ meal program” for interested freshmen, which, if taken advantage of, would help demystify the clubs.

Freshmen consistently ask for more social activities and more opportunities to meet upperclassmen in low-key, informal settings. Many freshmen perceive that most such activities are now fraternity and sorority parties. Some students are enthusiastic about attending, others are ambivalent, but feel they should attend if invited, and still others feel left out or uninterested. Fraternities and sororities take on great importance because they provide information about the social scene when freshmen are not yet familiar with Prospect Street. Many have voiced a sense of panic, that “the train is leaving the station without them” and therefore feel that participating in Greek life is critical to social success at Princeton. Freshmen clearly need increased exposure to a wider array of viable social options available at Princeton, ideally introduced by their peers in informal settings.

Students do call for combined college events so that freshmen can see classmates in other colleges.

A widely-voiced criticism had to do with the lack of tradition and school spirit in Orientation Week. Freshmen reported hearing of such events from friends at other schools and lamented their absence at Princeton. The University could provide a formal welcome for freshmen, a “pomp-and-circumstance” event, tethered to an opportunity to connect with other students. The USG has worked with various administrators to plan such an event following Opening Exercises. We applaud these efforts for their

community building value and also note that they are a good example of stewardship by upperclassmen towards the newest members of the student body.

International Pre-Orientation is also a positive model, one that provides social and informal interaction among freshmen and upperclass students. Participants report that this program is highly successful because it offers numerous opportunities for international freshmen to interact with one another and with upperclass students both in structured meetings and in casual social settings (e.g., shopping excursions, barbeques, trips to the shore, etc.). During these social events upperclass students serve as unofficial mentors to freshmen, connecting them to organizations, sharing information about social life, and more generally, introducing them to the Princeton community and life in the United States.

Further to foster upperclass connections, the University could encourage upperclass students to make contact over the summer with incoming students from their home state and to follow-up again during Orientation and in the early weeks of the fall term. This kind of outreach from upperclassmen would enhance the sense of inclusion in the Princeton community and would also be helpful in terms of practical matters such as travel, what to do during breaks, what items to bring to campus, etc. Student U-Council members are working together with the USG to develop an “Ambassadors Program” to foster such early connection.

Student Organizations and Post-Orientation Activities

Members of this subcommittee faced a major challenge in identifying which experiences out of many were critical for freshmen. They focused on five general areas: co-ops and Eating Clubs, fraternities and sororities, the residential colleges, Athletics (varsity and intramural), and student organizations. They solicited input from a range of constituencies, including co-op members and independent students, eating club members, members of fraternities and sororities, athletes, leaders of student organizations, random samples of freshmen, resident and minority affairs advisers, and administrators.

What follows is a summary of the subcommittee’s general findings:

Regarding overarching themes:

Interaction between freshmen and upperclass students plays a significant role in determining whether a student’s social experience in the first term of freshman year is positive or negative. In other words, those freshmen who come into regular contact with upperclass students – particularly the same upperclass students over and over – are more likely to report higher satisfaction with their social experience. Freshmen who enter their first term at the University already knowing other students, whether through athletics, pre-Orientation activities like OA or CA, or knowing classmates from their hometowns, are more likely to report higher satisfaction with their social experience.

Many freshmen would like a “second chance” at forming new friendships and/or joining new organizations in the second semester. A large number of students report that, because of scheduling pressures and time constraints, they fall into routines quite early in the fall term and find that they do not easily break out of the social networks they create. Students who participate in athletics, OA, CA, fraternities or sororities, or, at times, a freshman seminar, report that the bonds they form in the first semester are stronger than those of students who simply arrive at Orientation and follow the prescribed path through that week into the fall term.

Almost all freshmen want more inter-college/freshman class activities that would help them get to know their classmates in other colleges. While other classes typically plan class social events early in the fall, the election of freshmen class officers occurs later in the term (mid-October.) As a consequence, they are unable to plan class events until November. The University and the USG should explore ways to accelerate the election process for the freshmen class or consider ways to hold class events before class officers are elected (e.g. engage officers of the other three classes to plan and host some events.)

The University needs to provide straight-forward communication about fraternities, sororities, and the eating clubs. Currently there is an information vacuum from “official” sources – a perceived reluctance by the University to address the role of these organizations – that results in confusion among freshmen, a touch of resentment that the “truth” was not communicated to them before arriving, and a feeling, for some, of entrapment in a social system that is not to their liking. Many freshmen who are invited to join Greek organizations report satisfaction with the opportunities to interact with upperclassmen.

Student self-identity remains relatively plastic in the first semester, although there are some exceptions to this rule, most notably among athletes and some students who decide to join fraternities and sororities.

Freshmen talk about the lack of leadership opportunities for them within student organizations. Those who find such opportunities feel that they gain a sense of identity and of belonging, but most leadership positions are not available to freshmen. Some organizations seem to be more effective at creating opportunities for freshmen to develop leadership skills within their organizations. The Korean-American Students Association, for example, gives freshmen members the full responsibility for organizing an annual event, thereby introducing them to planning, fund-raising, marketing and other important aspects of organizational leadership. Other organizations should be encouraged to think about this approach.

It is important to encourage and support students to take social risks, try new extracurricular activities, and experiment with various organizations. While most college masters, deans, and directors of studies exhort students to take social risks in their welcoming addresses, the University needs to create systems that expose and funnel students into areas that, to them, represent taking a social risk. Freshmen may be more willing to take risks after their first semester on campus when they have a better sense of

what kind of time commitments they can make. In turn, organizations, especially low profile ones, need to do a better job of getting the word out in order to attract new members.

Recruited athletes are immediately integrated into a group that includes upperclass students, and they develop a sense of community early in their Princeton experience. Club sports have many of the same positive attributes as varsity sports, but many students report that they do not understand the nature of club sports, do not join until later in their Princeton careers, and hence do not have the benefit of finding community and a sense of belonging early on. While, overall, large numbers of upperclass students participate in intramurals, many freshmen have the perception that intramural sports are disorganized and that they do not get enough information about available opportunities and how to join. Intramurals could play a very important role in the social lives of freshmen if they are strongly promoted and better publicized.

The eating clubs play a large role in providing venues for informal socializing. Even though freshmen cannot become members of clubs, Prospect Street is nonetheless perceived as the “hub” of social life and as such has significant allure for freshmen. Students who are not members of a cohesive group and do not have upperclass connections find that socializing on the Street can be difficult. Freshmen seem either instantly to fall into the “Street” scene or quickly reject it. While some clubs are easily accessible to freshmen, the club scene, overall, can be intimidating. Some freshmen say they spend most of their leisure time in dorm rooms or in the few common spaces, such as Café Vivian or the Murray-Dodge Café. They would like more common spaces in their dorms where students can just “hang out.” Efforts to organize and publicize alternatives to Prospect Street have met with some success in recent years (e.g. Alcohol Initiative events, Princeton After Dark website and the student-led Social Opportunities Committee.) We encourage the continued support of these efforts.

We found that students are fairly neutral about their college social experience, but those who like their roommates or develop close friendships feel their experience is positive. Some, who do not participate in college activities, report feeling isolated. They attribute their choice not to participate to the amount of academic work and accompanying stress.

Fraternities and Sororities

Freshmen seek out communities within the larger Princeton community, and, for many, fraternities and sororities are the first social organizations they encounter to fulfill this need. The Committee discussed at some length the timing of rush and that interested freshmen are forced to make early, yet significant, commitments to these organizations. The impact of such an early fall rush on the first hundred days is not insignificant and was one that concerned us. Many students report that they join Greek organizations because of their desire to interact with upperclass students. Others may rush and join on account of informal obligations, chiefly a desire not to break away from newly established friends. While some students are very satisfied with the rush process, it can be a particularly disappointing experience for others because exclusion is not based on

objective criteria (e.g., not singing well enough to qualify for an a capella group) and leaves an amorphous sense of being rejected on account of personality. While some argue that such social disappointment is just part of life experience, it seems to us that the timing of this process works at cross-purposes with the University's larger objective of early inclusiveness and the exploration of a wide array of activities, friends and organizations in the first one hundred days. Additionally, membership dues for these organizations can be significant, in contrast to most other student organizations which are open to all students regardless of their financial resources.

In addition to the focus groups and interviews conducted by the subcommittees, Deans Deignan and Dunne and five student members of the Committee on the Freshman Social Experience met with fourteen representatives of fraternities and sororities. Information gathered from that meeting and from focus groups led us to the following observations:

Students who arrive at Princeton with a pre-established network seem to know in advance about making Greek organization connections. Fraternities do not seem to communicate broadly, but rather with fixed groups of freshmen, e.g., with a team, with students from a certain area of the country, siblings and/or friends from high school. Sororities communicate much more widely and invite many women to participate in rush.

Sorority rush is highly organized; sororities tend to communicate with one another and reach consensus about rush and pledging calendars and guidelines through their Pan-Hellenic Council. Sorority rush is intense and compressed into the first weeks of the semester. Fraternities operate much more independently. While committee members did not succeed in eliciting much detailed information about fraternity rush and pledging calendars, it appears that in some fraternities, pledging lasts as long as twenty weeks. It should be noted that two African-American sororities represented at our meeting reported that their national organizations prohibit freshmen rushing; students are ineligible for membership until the sophomore year and this seems to work well for them. In addition, several sororities indicated that the majority of those rushing last fall were sophomores.

Many students report that some fraternities and sororities appear to be a funnel into particular eating clubs, which is a useful tool for attracting new members. We believe this is unfortunate and only heightens the pressure to make what may be a precipitous decision to rush a Greek organization early in the freshmen year before a student has had the time to settle into his or her residential college, acclimate to new classes and fully explore the University community.

Recognizing that many students feel forced to make a commitment without complete information and before they may be ready to do so, committee members proposed to the fraternity/sorority members with whom they met that rush be moved back at least to December to give freshmen the opportunity to settle in and also not to have Greek affiliations divide the Class. This proposal was not met with any interest and we think it unlikely that the sororities and fraternities will pursue the suggestion.

One of the main problems for students is uncertainty about where the University stands. While the University does have a firm policy not to extend to Greek organizations the same privileges accorded to recognized groups, many students remain confused about this. With some 700 students belonging to Greek organizations, the administration's silence is, for many freshmen, difficult to interpret.

The committee not only wants to register ongoing concerns about the divisiveness of such an early Greek rush, but also calls for the creation of more opportunities for freshmen to interact with upperclass students so that fraternities and sororities are not perceived as the only venue for such contact.

Recommendations

The Committee on the Freshman Social Experience recommends the following:

With regard to pre-Orientation activities:

- Review the *Student Guide to Princeton* to ensure that it contains the most valuable practical advice.
- Review summer mailings to freshman. Find ways to organize the mailings, provide the same information on a website so students and parents do not have to worry about missing something, and streamline wherever possible so that freshmen do not feel inundated.
- Capitalize on technology as a means of enhancing communication among members of the freshman class prior to their arrival on campus. Such opportunities include enhancing the freshman class website and supporting the newly developed on-line "Facebook" that allows students to post a detailed personal profile. Provide incoming students with their Princeton e-mail addresses as soon as possible so that they can communicate with their roommates and other class members as connections develop.
- Explore with the Alumni Office and the Alumni Schools Committee ways to encourage alumni and parents to host more informal regional gatherings over the summer for members of the incoming class where they might meet other classmates and upperclass students from their area.
- Increase and improve publicity for Community Action; identify ways to improve its profile and shed the image of a second-tier program.
- Recruit fall sports teams and Outdoor Action leaders to help OA and CA participants move in and to welcome them and their families.
- Support the development of the proposed Ambassadors Program, LAMP, and other mentor groups that already have successful outreach. The USG-sponsored Ambassadors Program proposes to recruit and train upperclass students, who will communicate with freshmen over the summer and be available during Orientation and the first few months of the fall term to provide information about social life at Princeton and to help freshmen make connections to other student organizations and activities. Interaction will be one-on-one, rather than as a group. Posting information about these programs on the incoming class website will be essential.

With regard to Orientation Week:

- Create social traditions or experiences for freshmen that will “bookend” their four years at Princeton and will be echoed in Reunion and Commencement events. Provide the necessary resources to support these “spirit” initiatives. (The “Pre-Rade” following Opening Exercises was a good example of this sort of activity. Class presidents invited sophomores, juniors, and seniors to line up along the sidewalk leading from the Chapel to cheer freshmen as they walked down to Nassau Street, then onto campus through the FitzRandolph Gate. The Pre-Rade was followed with a barbecue on Alexander Beach, where class gear was distributed and freshmen learned Old Nassau and the locomotive cheer. Taking a class picture and organizing a freshmen step sing are other possibilities.)
- Consider changing the arrival time of freshmen who did not participate in a pre-Orientation program so that everyone arrives on Friday, i.e., returning OA/CA participants and all other freshmen. Hold a dance for everybody on Friday night, not just for returning OA and CA participants.
- Build in more time for informal interaction across classes. Include more social time, (e.g., late-night barbecues) so that Orientation is less passive.
- Hold a panel discussion or an eating club open house early in the fall to provide freshmen with an accurate view of club life.
- Hold a festive Saturday-night welcome dinner in the colleges.
- Consider finding an outdoor venue for Tiger Night so that more students can participate. Capitalize on this popular event by holding it in an upperclass courtyard.

To improve the freshman residential college social experience:

- Provide more spaces that encourage informal social interaction; extend the dining hall hours and use dining halls more extensively for late-night, or all-night, cafés.
- Hold more events that bring together all five colleges.
- Hold more social events early in the fall semester that reach out to different types of students.
- Use Intramurals and other intercollege competitions (e.g., college bowls) to forge students’ identification with their residential college.
- Encourage RAs/MAAs/RCAs to help students who fail to make early social connections to find their niche.
- Enhance and strengthen the intramurals program. Provide more information about them and better coordination.

Re: organizations and activities:

- Through the use of marketing campaigns encourage freshmen to take social risks in their extra-curricular lives at Princeton. (Attend an event sponsored by an identity group that is not your own; get involved in theater for the first time; learn a new traditional dance, write for a student publication.) Consider publishing a

booklet (similar to *Quintessentially Princeton*) which profiles Princeton students who took social risks, who moved beyond their high school interests.

- Hold a second Student Activities Fair in December to give students an opportunity to join organizations once they have assessed their time commitments and have a sense of how much work their classes require. Work with student organizations to “keep the door open” to new members so that students can join once they feel confident here.
- Provide accurate information about the eating clubs.
- Accelerate the organization of the freshmen class government to enable earlier organization of class events; enlist the help of upperclass officers in these efforts.
- Encourage centers, organizations and colleges to build into the structure of campus life, smaller, more regular events, rather than simply add “one-shot deal” events. The UFO film series is a good example, as is the Murray-Dodge Café and the Frist Café-Vivian performance series.

Re fraternities and sororities:

- While the Committee on the Freshman Social Experience was not able to engage representatives of fraternities and sororities in fruitful discussion, the committee recommends, nonetheless, that the University continue to encourage these groups to push back rush.
- The University should clearly communicate its policy about fraternities and sororities while acknowledging that some students will join anyway. The Committee is concerned about the effect of these organizations on the freshman experience, especially the first hundred days.

Conclusion

The challenge that remains for the University is to create a more inclusive community in an environment that values certain forms of exclusivity and to provide a sense of community early on, so that freshmen feel comfortable exploring the campus, enjoying new experiences, and finding their niche. Our paramount concern with respect to the freshmen social experience is the development of a sense of belonging. Key factors in our success will be the extent and nature of their interaction with upperclassmen, the availability of accurate information about social structures and the degree to which we are able to encourage social risk-taking.

Attachment A

Members of the Committee on the Freshman Year Social Experience

Eduardo Cadava, Associate Professor of English and Senior Fellow, Forbes College
Kathleen Deignan, Dean of Undergraduate Students, Chair
Thomas Dunne, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Students
Claire Fowler, Associate Dean of the College
Taylor Greason '04 – Civil Engineering major, crew, OA leader
Laurie Hall, Assistant Director for Programs, Frist Campus Center
Bo Honoré, Professor of Economics
Rishi Jaitly '04 – History major; class vp for four years; co-chair, Projects Board; Four-Year College Program Planning Committee
Leslie-Bernard Joseph '06 – Wilson College; Projects chair, Black Student Union; LAMP
Jan Logan, Assistant to the Vice President for Campus Life
Erin McDermott, Associate Director of Athletics
Daniel O'Brien '04 – RA, Rocky; soccer; Quad officer; SVC board
Kim Pearce '07 – hockey player, Butler College
Amy Saltzman '05 – Anthropology major; OA leader; Academics chair, USG
Frances Schendle '06 – Wilson College; Freshman Class President; Honor Committee; member and production manager, Disiac Dance Company; projects coordinator, Princeton College Democrats
Jonathan Schoenwald, Dean of Rockefeller College

Subcommittee Membership

Pre-Orientation

Erin McDermott, convener; Eduardo Cadava, Taylor Greason, Laurie Hall, Kim Pearce

Orientation

Tom Dunne, convener; Claire Fowler, Dan O'Brien, Amy Saltzman

Organizations and Activities

Jonathan Schoenwald, convener; Bo Honoré, Rishi Jaitly, Leslie-Bernard Joseph, Frances Schendle

Attachment B

Questions and Issues Raised by the Committee and Posed by the Subcommittees

Global

Are there problems that need to be solved?

Are we helping freshmen acclimate in the right ways?

What we think is important for **all** freshmen to know and to have? Do some hear things twice? Or never? Or do we have a wonderful hodgepodge that works? Are some things communicated only during pre-Orientation activities that nonparticipants then do not hear?

Within the first three or four weeks, where do students fall within the “herd mentality.” Do they go to the Street or do they make use of other resources?

Ask freshmen: Before you come, where do you think your affinities will lie? Three weeks in, where do they lie now? How hard is it to be an individual here?

Finding a place where you can become yourself vs. randomly identifying with a group for the sake of affiliation. How subcommunities establish identities while integrating into the larger campus community.

Finding the balance between comfort and challenge to create the optimal learning environment.

Pre-Orientation

University contact with students over the summer, including AlcoholEdu.

Pre-Orientation activities, how they connect, what they aim to address, what they actually achieve. If these programs are so important, should the University provide more support?

Segregation before on-campus Orientation: To what extent are we able to balance bonding/community building with the potential liabilities of segregation?

The 25-30 percent of incoming students who do not participate in any pre-Orientation activities: Could we create similar experiences for them on campus? Should there could be a mini-pre-Orientation program for those who cannot do CA or OA?

Outdoor Action

What are the questions with regard to OA, the biggest of those programs? What do we need to learn?

What is the content part of OA? What issues are raised, e.g., re alcohol education? Do leaders talk about their own experience? Or is there a party line? What do students carry out of the OA experience that helps them navigate Princeton (vs., say, FSI, which introduces students to the library, classrooms, etc.)?

Is there a correlation between choice of OA or CA and socioeconomic background?

Do students pick OA on account of social pressure? Is there is a way to measure the “cool factor,” e.g., of rappelling vs. charity?

Continuing the relationships of leaders and freshmen.

Students who do not participate in OA: Are they alienated?

What is the role of the OA group in the first hundred days on campus?

Tight-knit groups vs. the larger community; students who do not go on OA (athletes? students of color?); lack of diversity among OA leaders; getting OA leaders to be advisers; and using the trust built during frosh trip in a productive way.

The different dynamic of the large CA groups (twenty or so students) vs. the smaller OA groups.

The diversity breakdown of OA participants.

What is it about the OA experience that is so different? What can we learn from what is happening in these groups? Is it important for the entire class to have that experience?

How are the OA groups assembled?

Bonding in OA vs. work in CA.

How do OA and CA align with each other? What are the relative cost of the programs and of equipment?

Is there any coordination between Rick Curtis and CA or any coordination among OA and CA leaders.

The experience of OA and CA participants as groups when they return to campus.

Do urban students do OA?

Does OA have any lasting applications?

Community Action

How is CA pitched to students?

The different dynamic of the large CA groups (twenty or so students) vs. the smaller OA groups.

What is unique about CA? How are students who go on CA perceived here upon return?

Is there a correlation between choice of OA or CA and socioeconomic background?

Bonding in OA vs. work in CA.

How do OA and CA align with each other? What are the relative cost of the programs and of equipment?

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The experience of OA and CA participants as groups when they return to campus.

Athletes

What do coaches and captains say to athletes pre-season about the college experience (other than athletics)? What can we learn about the informal orientation of athletes and team cultures?

What questions do we want to ask about athletics?

What is it like for freshmen to be immediately in season as opposed to participating in winter and spring sports?

What messages do athletes hear about the larger campus community?

Pressure to go with the team and tensions between bonding with teammates and bonding with classmates.

Differences between recruited and nonrecruited athletes.

Athletes as assimilated via other athletes, who provide programs for them to meet each other and to broaden the community.

Do freshmen understand the difference between club sports and intramurals?

Social pressures, e.g., crew and rugby pitch “being cool” and providing an introduction to the eating clubs.

More funding, more equipment, and more field time for club sports.

Student attitude toward club sports. Are they willing to try something new?

Where is the cool factor for students who are not athletes? What about students who were athletes in high school who lose the cool factor here because they cannot “walk on”?

Perceptions that we’re a jock school vs. athletes, who feel that there are not enough jocks and that they think most students just do homework. Bifurcation of the campus.

Interactions between athletes and nonathletes.

To what extent does pre-season practice serve the same purpose as OA and CA, both in reality and in perception?

Official vs. unofficial activities for athletes, e.g., captains’ practices.

Problems getting athletes into the residential college communities.

Upperclass athletes tipping off freshmen that they do not need to attend certain so-called mandatory events.

Orientation Week

Basic Questions:

- 1) Was there a particular moment or experience during Orientation Week that made you feel you could find a place for yourself in the Princeton community?
- 2) Conversely, did anything happen during the first week that made you feel especially alienated?
- 3) What kinds of interactions did you have with upperclass students (excluding RAs, RCAs and MAAs)?
- 4) How did you spend your time that first week when you were not involved in formal orientation activities?
- 5) How well do you think orientation served you as an incoming freshman?

Follow-up Questions:

Attendance at nonacademic Orientation events: Some students go to all events; look at those who do not go. Which events did you attend? How would you rate them?

Reflections on Diversity; Sex on a Saturday Night; Health & Safety Presentation; Academic Integrity Assembly; Tiger Night, Tiger's Roar, Freshman/Senior Picnic; Frist Welcome Party; Student Activities Fair. How popular are events, are they well attended, could they benefit from more publicity? Could upperclass students be helpful in fostering intellectual engagement?

Opportunities for interaction among freshmen: What kinds of bigger venues should the University provide?

The dual goals of creating a class identity and of integrating freshmen with other classes: Did Orientation meet these goals?

Honestly telling freshmen where and why to go; providing incentives. Prioritizing Orientation events realistically and asking upperclass students, who have the trust of freshmen, to advise. Clearly identifying mandatory events and providing a separate schedule of optional events. Were you aware which events were mandatory? What prompted you to attend.

Are Orientation events too similar? Are there particular groups that do not attend?

What do upperclass students think about Orientation events?

If 50 percent do not go, why? Were you told it is not worth it? Is too much offered?

How to balance competing concerns, i.e., too few events vs. too many: Did you have time to hang out? Did you skip events in order to hang out?

What are students who do not attend Orientation events actually doing, i.e., attending frat parties, unpacking, etc.?

Improving interaction among freshmen and sophomores in the colleges: Did sophomores make you feel welcome in your college? How did you meet them?

Are there things that are missing from Orientation on the social/educational side?

What about informational events? Are we giving freshmen what they need?

Providing information about the Princeton community: Did you learn where to buy stuff, get your hair cut, etc.?

How much impact do “official” vs. informal activities have?

Other Issues of Interest:

The role of Greek organizations and eating clubs in freshman social life.

Making communication of community standards and cultural norms more of an intellectual engagement rather than “us telling the students.”

Acclimatizing freshmen to University standards regarding respect, community, diversity, and behavior while trying to fit truly social opportunities to find friends, mentors, and communities where students feel at home into the Orientation schedule.

What happens to those students who have not participated in pre-Orientation programs?

The effect of very cohesive small groups in a residential college.

How can the sense of community developed in a pre-Orientation program be re-formed during actual Orientation? How does living with someone from your OA group in a residential college affect your experience there?

What is the role of RA groups?

Taking greater advantage of the residential colleges to encourage interaction among upperclass students and freshmen, e.g., by holding University-sponsored events in the colleges. Faculty/student interaction outside the classroom, e.g., the “Coffee Talk” program at Rocky.

How do upperclass students interact with freshmen during Orientation Week?
Mobilizing the sophomores as a resource in the residential colleges.

Fraternities and Sororities and Student Organizations

1. At what point during the academic year does “recruiting” and rush officially begin? How exactly do fraternities and sororities go about attracting new members? Besides parties, how exactly do individual fraternities and sororities spread the word about their particular organization? E-mails? Word-of-mouth? Do they target particular sub-communities that already exist?
2. How would fraternities and sororities compare their fall rush season with that which occurs in the spring? Is one more popular than the other? How do the students rushing in the spring differ from those doing so in the fall? What reasons do those who rushed in the fall give for doing so? What about those that did so in the spring? How would fraternities and sororities feel about moving their initial rush period for freshmen to the spring?
3. What are RAs, MAAs, OA Leaders, and CA Leaders telling their freshmen about fraternities and sororities, if anything? What kinds of information do fraternities and sororities give to freshmen who are interested in rushing? How are the questions of freshmen answered by members? Is the presence of fraternities and sororities on Princeton’s campus exaggerated or overly-glorified to freshmen? Is the information they are getting accurate?
4. What kinds of social pressures (i.e. athletic teams) do freshmen face to join a fraternity or sorority?
5. Why do some freshmen who are enticed by and attend fraternity and sorority parties, events, etc decide not to rush? What reasons do these students who are ‘on the brink’ give when asked why they did not rush?

Student Organizations

1. What sort of thought process do freshmen use when deciding to join one student organization or another? Do they think back to what they were involved in during high school? Why do some freshmen decide to challenge themselves and take chances and try new activities? Why do others not do this?
2. How does a freshmen member of a student organization go from being on the e-mail list of a particular organization to being a full-fledged member to being a real leader? Is the “get on the e-mail list” culture too pervasive and preventing people from really getting involved in an organization and finding community? At what point do students begin to identify themselves with particular student organizations and their particular communities? What does it take? Writing an article, going on a trip? Should there be a more tangible programming (a la initiations but not initiations) that might make people feel attached?
3. Do new freshmen members feel as though there should be more leadership opportunities geared especially towards them to give them some sort of ownership of their organization?
4. Do members of student organizations (in particular ethnic ones) ever feel socially trapped and segregated immediately? Do some freshmen feel as though being a member of one student organization precludes them from being a member of another

student organization (i.e., with ethnic groups, publications, etc.)? Do selective organizations (namely performance groups) breed a certain kind of elitism within organization circles?

5. Freshmen are constantly told by a variety of sources that they should explore academics to the fullest while at Princeton. Are the advantages of exploring and trying new extracurricular activities and/or student organizations ever explained to freshmen? Or are freshmen who do dabble all over the place simply naturally motivated?
6. After the first 100 days of freshman year, where does student organization affiliation lie in the hierarchy of Princeton labels?

The RA/RCA/MAA Perspective on the Freshman Social Experience

1. What do your freshmen tell you about their social experience? (Do they feel that there is social stratification? Or do they feel that interests are the most significant factor in determining one's social life?)
2. Which students feel that Princeton's social scene is less fluid for them?
3. What types of students do you notice become disconnected from the rest of their peers early on?
4. What factors contribute to this disconnection? (i.e., different extracurriculars, race, socio-economic disparities, the Street, etc. etc.)
5. Which students have the most trouble integrating and why?
6. How much does rooming arrangement affect a freshmen's adjustment? (i.e. living in a single vs. quad, vs. larger suite)
7. What types of students get disconnected from their suite?
8. At what point during the school year do you notice some students falling through the cracks socially? (i.e., they do not seem to be developing a core group of friends, or feel comfortable)
9. What experiences do your zees point to as reasons for having a positive social experience? Having a negative experience or difficulties?
10. How have the Street, fraternities, and sororities affected your freshmen?
11. What specific concerns do minority students express to you?
12. What conflicts concerning diversity, in relation to the Princeton social scene, come up most frequently & are most divisive?
13. Do majority students appreciate social diversity?
14. After orientation week, do freshmen feel that they immediately belong to a larger Princeton community? Does the perception change throughout the semester?
15. Do your freshmen feel that Princeton offers a variety of social outlets?
16. What type of student is unhappy with the social experience?
17. What happens to the student who is forced to deal with rejection early on? (either from a performing arts group, athletic team, rush, or some other selective process)
18. Describe the social scene within your residential college. How does it differ from the larger University community?
19. How does the advising system facilitate social interaction?
20. How does sexual orientation impact your zees' social experience? What is the difference for LGBT students?

Athletics and the Freshman Social Experience

When you first get here:

- To what extent do interactions with upperclassmen teammates substitute for attending organized events? What type of events?
- Do *social pressures* or *rational choices* lead freshmen to miss events?
- Is the instantaneous integration into a community (the team) seen as superior to the “orchestrated” integration elsewhere? Does the answer to that change over time (short run vs. long run)?

In the off season:

- To what extent are athletes “trapped” to hang out with their teammates? Is it too late to meet non-athletes?
- Are there enough opportunities for switching into non-athlete mode? Or is it “too late” because all the groups have already formed?

During the season:

- To what extent does time/fatigue prevent athletes from taking part in other social activities?
- To what extent does the integration within the team depend on athletic abilities? Race? Geography? Other?
- Are there other within-team social issues?

In general:

- Do non-athletes discriminate against athletes?
- How about RA’s? Administrators? Faculty?
- Does the gender-segregation associated with being an athlete make it more difficult to form friendships across gender? Is that a big deal?
- Does athletics contribute to other segregation (say, racial)?

Club sports:

- What is the clientele?
- Is it for experts or is everybody welcome?
- Is there an unmet demand for athletic activities?

Co-Ops, Eating Clubs, and Student Organizations

1. How did you become aware of and involved in your organization? When did you become involved?
2. How important is it for a member of your organization to have some past experience?

3. What methods do you use in order to recruit new membership?
4. What times of the year do you focus your recruitment? Is it necessary for students to join your organization at particular times in the year, or are they free to join at any time?
5. What obstacles have you encountered in your efforts to attract new members (primarily freshmen)?
6. What kinds of leadership opportunities, if any, exist for freshman members of your organization?

Questions asked at Co-ops:

1. How did you decide to join the Brown Co-op? (Follow up: eating or social reasons? Did you consider joining an eating club?)
2. Describe your social experience currently? What was your social experience like during your freshman year? How did it differ?
3. What exposure do freshmen have to eating and social options other than the street?
4. In what ways do co-ops advertise to/recruit new members?

Questions asked at Eating Clubs:

1. How did you decide to join your eating club? (Follow up: eating or social reasons? Did you consider other options?)
2. Describe your social experience currently? What was your experience like during your freshman year? How did it differ?
3. At what point did you decide to join this eating club? Did you investigate many options, or did you narrow quickly?
4. How often did you attend social events at your eating club during your freshman year?
5. How many social events have you attended that are not on the “street”? Now and during freshman year?
6. To what extent do you think the street is accessible to freshmen?

The Colleges

Questions for the Colleges:

1. How would you rank your college identity compared to other ways that you identify yourself (i.e., do you think of yourself first as a Rocky student or, say, a swimmer or a member of an a cappella group)? Why?
2. How do you form your circle of friends within the college: Proximity? Activities? Classes?
3. What is your perception of the role of the colleges vis-à-vis your academic and social experiences? In other words, do you perceive the college to be an extension of your academic life, providing speakers, programs, etc., or is it a haven from the pressures of academics?

4. What do you think two “successful” years in a college should look like? What would be some of the representative activities or signs?
5. If you could change one thing about the colleges in regards to the first semester freshman experience, what would it be?

Questions for the Administration

1. What role does the administration play in advertising student organizations to freshmen and encouraging them to investigate organized activities? How do students discover organizations after the activities fair on Friday of orientation week?
2. How much attention is paid to non-mainstream students (e.g., perhaps students who came to Princeton despite the eating clubs)?
3. What efforts do we make to convince students that we want them to take social risks in their first semester at Princeton?
4. How do we balance the dilemma of an overabundance of organizations and opportunities with the idea that the typical solution to a problem is to *create* more opportunities?
5. It seems that each year the seniors who win the major prizes at Princeton have figured out how to create multiple identities for themselves. In other words, they aren't just athletes or dancers, but also leaders, scholars, etc. How might we encourage incoming students to replicate their actions?