



BLUE & WHITE SOCIETY
STUDENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE PENN STATE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

We Are...Not Interested?

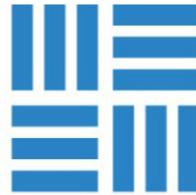
**Recommendations for Improved Membership
Involvement for the Blue & White Society**



Source: Penn State. Flickr

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Recommendations for Improved Membership Involvement for the Blue & White Society



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Prepared for
Meeten Doshi,
Executive President
& the Executive Board

Prepared by
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April 24, 2014

Memo of Transmittal

TO: Meeten Doshi, President of Blue & White Society
FROM: Alex Dubin, Sarika Patel, Eric Willinksy, & Sam Smith
DATE: April 21, 2014
SUBJECT: Recommendations Report for Increased Membership Involvement

Hello Meeten,

Here is the report you requested regarding an analysis of strategies to increase membership retention in the Blue & White Society.

Through our conversation with you and various members of the Blue & White Society, we identified a lack of membership engagement and involvement as the primary issue. This issue has plagued the Blue & White Society for an extended period, and efforts to resolve it have either been ineffective or overlooked. Additionally, our research supports the concern you had in regards to an insufficiency of members to staff existing positions and committees within the organization. Our team concurs that these are significant issues which must be resolved.

Fortunately, many feasible and achievable solutions exist that can be pursued and implemented to solve the aforementioned issues. These recommendations will be expounded upon in the attached packet. Chiefly, we recommend increasing recruiting efforts through improved public relations campaigns and effective usage of social media outlets. Additionally, we recommend increasing membership retention by improving event offerings and focusing on facilitating alumni connections. Augmenting incentives for joining and creating a more exclusive environment around the organization will increase retention and engagement of members in the Blue & White Society. Finally, restructuring the organization and consolidating positions could eliminate some of the staffing and coordination issues.

Instituting new policies, changing the focus and services, and adapting the demeanor of the organization will be challenging, but we believe that these strategies will be effective and ensure long term success and prosperity.

We are very grateful for all the time you spent explaining your organization and the current state of affairs with us, especially Annie Krichten and Chad Eichelberger for their assistance. Thank you for sharing your experiences and concerns.

Additionally, thank you for giving us the ability to work with your organization and generate effective recommendations to solve some of Blue & White Society's issues. It was certainly a great learning experience and an exciting challenge. If you have any questions with this report, please give us a call, and we will be happy to meet with you.

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Executive Summary

This report contains an analysis and recommendations for the Penn State Blue & White Society in order to retain and expand membership to truly become the student organization that provides the “ultimate Penn State experience”.

Blue & White Society’s Main Problem

The Blue & White Society is one of Penn State’s largest student organizations and serves as the only official student alumni association on campus. Currently, the organization boasts the largest membership on campus, but its active membership remains grossly disproportionate. The organization remains unable to function all of its student committees or fill the entire executive board, preventing it from reaching its full potential.

Research shows other organizations on campus and other student alumni organizations at Big Ten universities provide unique opportunities that students appreciate and encourage them to join year after year. Without such an offering the Blue & White Society suffers severely lowered retention rates and fails to inspire students to return to the organization.

This problem stems from a lack of understanding the student body's needs and failure to capitalize on vital resources within the organization to promote key membership benefits.

Recommendations to Improve the Organization

In order for the Blue & White Society to stabilize itself and increase its presence on campus, the organization must make targeted efforts moving forward. To reach a larger audience, it must increase social media usage and make information readily available to more than just the “active members” of the organization.

The organizations must also capitalize on its unique connection with the Alumni Association and clearly market this benefit to students. To differentiate itself from other school spirit organizations, the Blue & White society should offer networking opportunities exclusively to members.

Additionally, the organization should incentivize membership by administering stricter membership guidelines and providing direct benefits of being a part of the organization. If members view it as a more exclusive organization, students will be motivated to maintain membership and actively participate in events.

Lastly, the organization utilizes an extensive executive board with numerous functions, to streamline the organization, it would be ideal to consolidate organizational committees and executive positions. By having a core team, the organization can efficiently coordinate communication and activities across the organization.

This report further outlines the research that has led to these recommendations and provides an in-depth implementation plan so that the organization may resolve the issues currently plaguing its success.

Introduction

Over the past few years, the Blue & White Society has concerned itself with recruiting and retaining active members in the organization. Executive boards have experimented with varying methods to increase these numbers including the restructuring of general meetings, introducing of a family system, and partnering with other Penn State clubs, all to no avail. As requested by the Blue & White Society executive board due to our group member's previous experience as an executive board member, interviews with executives were administered to understand these unsuccessful efforts.

The interviews uncovered the primary issue of mishandling the problem. Rather than increasing active membership (defined as paying dues and attending one meeting), focus should be directed towards recruiting members to fill committee positions and promoting involved membership (defined as attending multiple committees). According to the research results of the organization, Blue & White Society offers numerous ways for students to involvement themselves at Penn State, but they lack the members to utilize all the committees, preventing interested students from being involved. Secondly, the organization remains unable to fill all the executive positions available in the organization. Findings indicate involved members prove most likely to run for these positions. Without this involved

membership, the organization may be forced to disband.

With a better understanding of the problem at hand, the purpose of this report is to refocus organizational problems, analyze solutions, and develop a number of recommendations for the Blue & White Society. From this analysis, four recommendations have been identified including improving recruitment through advertising, increasing membership retention by providing networking opportunities, improving membership involvement with incentives, and restructuring organizational systems to encourage efficiency. The rest of report will detail the research that went into each of these recommendations and the steps required to implement the actual solutions.

In developing this report, the group administered a number of questionnaires to Penn State students (Appendix A) to acquire their opinion on organizational membership, advertising, and the Blue & White Society. Additionally, interviews with executive members both in and outside the Blue & White society along with analyses of Big 10 student alumni associations were utilized. The results of the questionnaires will be limited due to the restricted number of students willing to participate, but this should in no way affect the overall results of the report.



Source: Samantha King. Facebook

Improvements in Year Round Recruitment

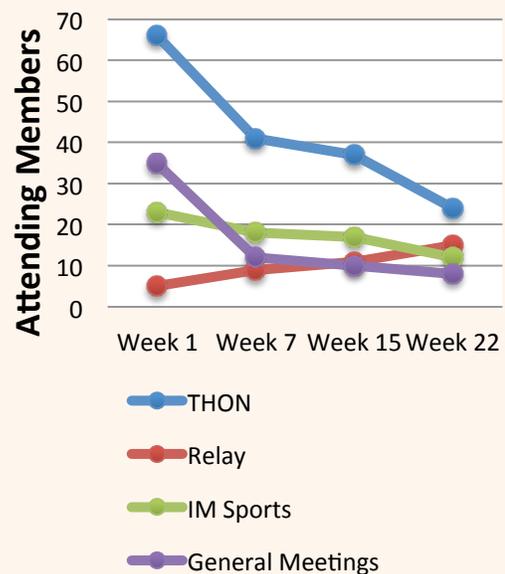
Blue & White Society’s Initial offerings recruit an outstanding number of students at around 10,000 members and 250 active members. However, recruitment efforts cease to exist rest the year, resulting in a drastic decrease in attendance after the first month (Figure 1). This leads yearlong committees to dwindle in their efforts as the year progresses. Improvements in advertising and PR prove necessary to replenish this yearly turnover.

Research Demonstrates Support for Online Advertising

Questionnaires distributed to students across Penn State indicate that they seem to focus on social media as their means of learning about events happening across campus. Facebook, Twitter, and e-mails tend to be the preferred from of advertising for college students. These sources provide students will a way to receive messages on the go via their Smartphones or laptops, and they are easily found if forgotten. Flyers also inform students of events, but they seem to require supplementation with social media.

Acknowledging this, interviews with student executives within the Blue & White Society and a study of current advertising indicate

Figure 1
Progression of Blue & White Society Attendance 2013-2014



that the organization fails to utilize most of its social media efforts to their fullest extent. Currently, the Facebook page, which was created 4/08/13, only has 420 likes with sporadic posting. The page is a great resource for events and activities, but they have limited power and reach due to their minimal likes. In addition, it provides no information on ways to join. The Twitter account also acts sporadically, only posting during the most significant events of the year and remaining silent the rest of the time. With more than 800 followers, this resource has the potential to recruit members if utilized properly. E-mails prove the most effective, containing all the necessary information about events and how to learn more. However, these e-mails only appear to active members. They fail to benefit recruiting efforts if they only target students who are already active.

Increase Use and Availability of Online Media

Since a substantial number of students attend the initial Blue & White Society events, including Bash and initial general meetings, we recommend the organization starts by broadcasting its online presence and encouraging students to join either Facebook or Twitter at these events. The organization can offer a substantial prize including a Kindle or free football tickets to those who join either of these online groups. The process of joining these groups proves simple, and once they join, students rarely leave unless they disapprove of the content or find it unsatisfactory. This will allow students to continuously see various offerings and join throughout the year.

This campaign must also be paired with increased use of these online mediums. We suggest the Facebook page contain more

relevant information of the organization including how to join and news updates. It should also encourage responses from the members to ensure the posts remain visible to them. The Twitter feed must also offer more consistent updates in regards to the organization that relate to all members. Currently, the posts display only the executive board rather than the actual members which can deter students.

Finally, we recommend that emails be sent to all members rather than just the active members. These e-mails provide a wealth of information and remain the most common way students hear about Blue & White Society. By limiting access to it, the organization stunts the possibility of recruiting new members from it.

From this research, it is clear than the advertising and PR practices of the organization will need revitalized to improve recruitment throughout the year. Although these recommendations will increase the workload of the Director of PR and alter the organizations advertising routine, this will improve the organization's image across campus with a stronger presence, and it will allow for greater student reach for recruitment.



Source: Eric Willinsky. Personal

Development of Competitive Advantage

Although improved advertising campaign will attract additional members to events, Blue & White Society must develop a way to retain these students throughout the year. For that to occur, the organization will need a competitive advantage that sets it apart from the rest. Research into organizations on and off campus has revealed methods in which Blue & White society can differentiate itself to prevent the inevitable yearly leaving of uninterested members

Students Want Something Unique

While the Blue & White Society boasts the largest dues paying membership on campus, the organization struggles in terms of membership retention. Active membership begins at roughly 250 members each year and finishes at around 40, a retention rate of 16%. Several universities, particularly ones in the Big Ten Conference, have similar organizations connecting students to alumni. However, the research indicates that rather than simply offering a college experience, these organizations devote themselves to providing networking opportunities for its members, and it tends to work. Those universities that offer this service retain members at a much higher rate.

Senior Umar Rashid, the Executive Director for Infusion says that their membership retention is dependent on being able to provide committee members with a unique experience. “You need to make sure your organization is giving students something they can’t get anywhere else and the experience is worth their time.” While the Blue & White Society claims to provide “the ultimate Penn State experience” the benefits of joining are not explicitly stated and the “ultimate Penn State experience” seems to be a culmination of some of the largest events on campus.

Finally, questionnaires demonstrate that students mostly join organizations due to their interest of the organizations offerings

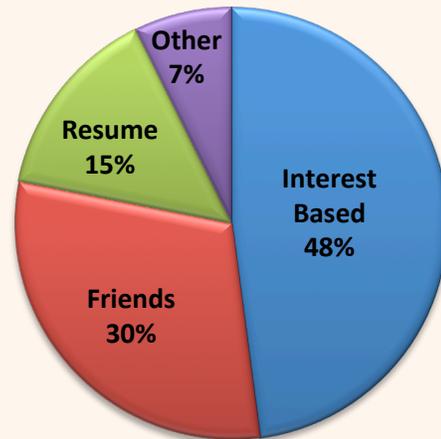
(Figure 2). Additionally, when asked specifically what they expect from a “student alumni association,” they mention extensive connections and outreach opportunities with alumni for career and personal development. While the Blue & White Society allows members access to the Alumni Association directory, this benefit is not promoted, and members aren’t given any exclusive face time opportunities.

Provide Exclusive Networking Opportunities for Members

In order to better serve the student body’s needs and differentiate from other student organizations, the Blue & White Society should offer exclusive networking opportunities with alumni. They must begin by ingraining this into the organization’s mission. Currently, the mission involves providing the “ultimate Penn State experience,” but every club on campus provides this. Blue & White Society can continue doing this; however, it must also emphasize its connection to alumni and begin with offering monthly networking opportunities with alumni. This could include a professional development day during career fair season or a casual mixer for students to hear stories about life after Penn State. These events can take place during weekends when alumni return or during recruiting season when many Penn Staters recruit on behalf of their companies.

To handle all these new networking opportunities, the organization may need to devote additional executive positions to this cause, adding to the already existing clutter.

Figure 2
PSU Students' Reasons for Joining Campus Organizations



It also requires changing the mindset of the organization from that of broad experiences to a focused competitive advantage.

However, the exclusivity of these events and direct benefits will help current members see the value in their membership and encourage potential members to cross the threshold into paying their membership dues. Having events that cater to the members needs will help dues paying members to see the direct benefits of being part of Blue & White Society and will encourage them to continue to return in future years. By utilizing alumni connections, the organization can differentiate from other student organizations that are also deeply rooted in Penn State tradition and claim to provide a “Penn State experience.”



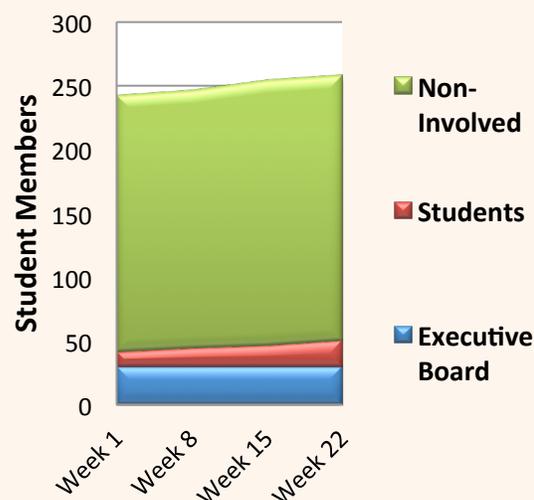
Incentives for Membership Involvement

With networking attracting members, the report turns towards increasing member involvement. Research indicates that members active across the organization tend to run for executive positions, but current numbers (Figure 3) barely cover executive turnover. Unless involvement increases, the organization will fail to fill enough positions to function. Interviews with student executives demonstrate methods of increasing involvement.

Incentives and Exclusivity Drive Membership Involvement

After some due diligence and analysis on why other organizations at Penn State enjoy excellent membership involvement, it has become apparent that providing members with clear incentives is essential. Our research indicates that thriving organizations including the Professional Management Association and Infusion apply stricter guidelines for members that are explicit and published, along with stronger incentives for adhering to them. On the other hand, Blue & White Society only offers active members the right to vote in elections. By creating a structured environment, organizations compel members to be involved.

Figure 3
Distribution of Blue & White Society's "Active Membership"



Some examples that research found include Wall Street Bootcamp and PMA. The Bootcamp requires members to meet once a week, discouraging absences with compelling meetings with Smeal Alumni. Those who follow all guidelines interview for a chance to receive a list of over 500 Smeal Alumni who currently work in Finance and are willing to speak to you concerning applications, job requests, and any general questions. PMA requires members to attend events in each of their four committees and achieve a certain number of points. Those who do receive an end of the year banquet with permission to include PMA on their future resumes. Both organizations have demonstrated a majority of membership involvement across the organization.

Another essential element seems to be exclusivity of organizations. Other student alumni organizations and Wall Street Bootcamp utilize an application process, only inviting a certain number of members. This competitiveness creates a proud feeling for members who are chosen and makes them want to become more engaged.

Provide Incentives and Create Stricter Membership Guidelines

These proven measures from other organizations can be implemented into the Blue & White Society. To begin, the organization should indefinitely alter their requirements in terms of involvement. As it stands, “active membership” requires dues and one meeting attendance. Since these members are not truly active, this paints a false picture of membership involvement. This report suggests following PMA’s example and requiring attendance in at least one meeting and one event for each committee. With the number of committees and the fact that most

last year round, this should provide enough engagement for members.

Next, to encourage members to want to achieve active status, this report recommends developing an incentive program for these students. It is suggested that the organization offers an involvement plan with the more engaged a member becomes, the more they can receive. This can include a basic level offering a shirt and an advanced level with a free basketball ticket or something else significant. With access to the alumni association, incentives for this program could become quite creative depending on preferences.

Initially, utilizing new active membership guidelines may drastically reduce the yearly average of 250 active members, and incentives may seem costly to the organization. However, you will find the new numbers to more accurately represent the condition of the organization and allow for adjustments to be administered based on them. In addition, the exclusivity provides members with a sense of pride as well as increases their desire to be active within the organization. Incentives provided to active members as well as executive board members would also greatly increase the likelihood of members to run for executive positions, helping to resolve the issues currently facing the Blue & White Society.



Source: Samantha King. Website

Restructuring of Organizational Systems

Although ways have been discussed to improve membership, research indicates that the structure of various organizational systems including executive positions and committees further instigates problems within the organization. Since these seem to lead to poor communication and lack of focusing on objectives, it is necessary to address these to ensure efficient utilization of previous recommendations.

Resources are Stretched Too Thin

The Blue & White Society offers students the numerous opportunities to be involved across Penn State, serving as a feeder organization, a conduit to the myriad groups and clubs on campus. However, an analysis of the organization indicates that this predominant feature of channeling students towards other organizations serves as both a strength and weakness for the organization.

The Blue & White Society has grown diffuse and overextended. The appendages of the organization are spread thinly,

ranging from homecoming to pep rallies to community service, and this jeopardizes the core functions of the organization. the organization struggles to fill the executive positions necessary to execute the goals of

these numerous committees and the organization as a whole. With a lack of administrative and executive positions, projects fail to be completed and efforts are forced to be abandoned.

Additionally, interviews with executive members reveal that the extended network of executives, over 32 total, and the diverse projects across committees limits the

coordination and efficiency of communication within the organization. Within community service, the Director of Community Service must attend projects in each of the three committees. To alleviate this stress, the organization created another Director position which required coordination with both committees and directors, leading to lost information. The organization's primary response to increased activity seems to gravitate towards creating additional positions.

Consolidate Similar Systems

This report recommends going against the organization's instinct of diversification and instead consolidate similar systems within the organization, redirecting its focus on fewer objectives and projects. This includes both committees and positions held within the Blue & White Society. It is suggested you begin with the various committees. As was already mentioned, the community service department holds three separate committees, two struggling to acquire enough members. Since they all employ similar goals, formation into one committee would prove beneficial. Homecoming and pep rallies both focus on school spirit, so it could also be considered. Once committees have merged, the positions of those

committees can also consolidate since they will no longer require the human resources to monitor various projects and goals.

Understandably, no organization wants to eliminate internal positions especially since most of them have already been filled. In addition, eliminating committees limits how much of the Penn State experience the organization can offer. However, without merging committees, certain committees will be unable to function at all. With this method, the Blue & White Society can still offer something directed towards the interests of the students rather than nothing at all. As for the positions, rather than wholly eliminating them, the functions and objectives of some could be amalgamated into dual positions for this upcoming year. Then, during next election season, you can begin eliminating positions as you see fit.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Blue & White Society continues to struggle with reaching the necessary members for committees to function and the organization to run properly. Without resolving this issue soon, the organization stands to face the possibility of obsolescence and termination.

For the past few years, the organization has focused on increasing active membership to resolve the lack of members; however, this method proved too ambiguous and ineffective. The organization must work to improve certain focused areas related to membership including recruitment, retention, and involvement along with restructuring the organization. By doing so, it will prove easier to solve the problems plaguing the organizations

In order to improve these areas within the Blue & White Society, it must take a number of steps:

Increase use and availability of online media. The organization should increase their use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Over the next year, contests and prizes should be given to students at Blue & White Society events to those who join these mediums, and the Director of PR must update these sources more often. In addition, the organization should begin sending active member emails to all members to encourage participation.

Develop networking opportunities for members. The Blue & White Society should make use of its alumni connections and offer additional networking events in the upcoming year. Few organizations can offer this form to its members, and research shows it's something students would be interested in attending in the future.

Provide incentives for organizational involvement. The organization should consider providing varying incentives for members depending on their involvement in the organization. With your access to the alumni association, these benefits could range from discounts on membership to student tickets to athletic events. In addition, by increasing the requirements of becoming a member, students will feel more committed to the cause.

Restructure positions and committees. The organization should consider consolidating committees and executive positions to ensure a more efficient use of time and resources. Similar committees, such as Relay for Life and THON, can be combined into a Community Service Committee and function better with a consolidated and focused goal.

By taking these necessary steps, we can expect improved membership over the next few years. In addition, by following this, the organization will have an easier time developing solutions in each of these focused areas rather than blindly attempting to "improve active membership." With a consolidated structure, you can expect improved coordination across the organization, allowing for quicker decisions and more relevant activities

The organization sits at a tipping point. If action is not taken soon, there may not be another chance. We implore the organization to consider these recommendations to ensure the continued benefits of this organization for other students for years to come.

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Appendix

Appendix A.

This was the questionnaire administered to students across campus. Its purpose was to determine students various opinions on organizations, advertising, and the Blue & White Society.

1. Are you a member of any organizations?

- yes
- no

2. (If yes) why did you choose that organization?

- already had friends in
- resume builder
- interest based
- alumni relations
- Other

3. How do you learn or hear about organizations?

- friends
- newspaper
- organizations website
- social media
- organization fair

4. If you are not involved with an organization, why not?

- time constraints
- apathy
- haven't found an attractive one
- was a member, but left

5. If you were a member but left, why did you leave?

- frustration with management
- too busy
- lost interest
- Other

6. Have you heard of the Blue & White Society?

- yes
- no

7. If you have heard of them, are you familiar with what they do and their mission statement?

- no
- If yes, what do they do?

8. Have you seen advertisements for the Blue & White Society

- yes
- no
- If yes, where and what type of ad?

9. Have you visited the organizations website?

- yes
- no

10. What would entice you to join an organization

- yes
- Other (please specify)