



Keri Anne Davis, 2002 Hey Day director at Auburn University in Alabama, gets chummy with mascot Aubie the Tiger. On Hey Day, students wear name tags and say, "hey" to everyone they pass on campus.

# United You'll Stand

## How to build a true campus community

By Ashley Tarbet

One glance around a college basketball game, with its face-painted fans, catchy chants, and waving streamers, and you see a picture of school spirit that never fades or falters. Take an in-depth look at that school's campus, however, and this image all too often is just a façade.

Instilling lasting school pride in students is a difficult task and maintaining it may seem impossible. Don't fret just yet; solutions to sagging spirit can be found with a little creativity and a lot of student dedication. Here's some advice from four schools who took advantage of their assets to build a true community spirit—one that lasts after the final buzzer sounds.

### Tip #1: Keep Tradition Alive

"There's just something about this place," says Bryan Barton, vice president of policy for Student Government and the campus relations sub-chair of Traditions Council at **Texas A&M University**. "Yes, it's 45,000 students large, but it doesn't feel that big." Barton attributes this sense of community to strong campus traditions.

For TAMU, the best way to keep tradition alive was by forming a council. "Traditions Council is about supporting the traditions of the school, and understanding what sets TAMU apart from other colleges," Barton says. The 54 council members—a student-run organization under SG—are selected through a competitive application process. "The members have to have a deep love and respect for the school," Barton says.

Outreach efforts by the Traditions Council include the distribution of "Did you know?" fact sheets about TAMU traditions and the organization of an annual 5K race. "Run for the Ring" increases awareness about Aggie rings and the rich tradition behind them, Barton says.

Barton stresses that while outreach is important, so is the "doing"—keeping the actual traditions sustained year after year. TAMU's most popular tradition, "Muster," is run by its own committee under SG. "Muster is held on April 24th throughout the world," Barton says. "It's where you honor current and former Aggies who have passed away during the year. People gather wherever their hometown is and sit and talk about their days at TAMU."

Barton believes that promotion must be a grass-roots endeavor—not force-fed from administration or alumni. "It has to be a student-run effort," Barton says. "It takes time, but things catch on. For us, it's paid off huge."

### Tip #2: Unite Your Organizations

You can't expect to unify your students without first integrating your organizations. **La Salle University**, a Catholic institution of 3,500 students in Pennsylvania, developed a sense of community by finding common denominators among clubs and encouraging them to work together.

This approach may be especially effective in smaller schools, says Bill Wiegman, Student Government Association vice president. La Salle's size allows for an SGA member to be on every school organization committee. "SGA meets weekly with La Salle's other major organizations in a group

called 'The Point,'" Wiegman says. "There, we can talk about issues that we can work together on."

"Our community is about building relationships and knowing who to approach," Wiegman says. "This year, for example, we came together and made a big push for our basketball team when we realized they weren't getting much support at the games," he says. "We formed an ad-hoc committee with members from five of the major organizations on campus and ended up getting a really great turnout at games."

### Tip #3: Big School? Plan Big Events


At the nation's largest public schools, students tend to get lost in the crowd. But with some effort, this crowd can be used to your advantage. Despite its size of 22,000 students, **Auburn University** in Alabama is a school where everyone knows your name—at least one day of the year. "We have an annual tradition called 'Hey Day,'" says Jessica Eastman, SGA student senator. "During this day, there are bands on the main part of campus and free food, and everyone wears a nametag. Students say 'hey' to everyone they pass, even people they've never met. It's a way we celebrate the friendly, welcoming atmosphere that's at the heart of Auburn."

Planning an event of this magnitude takes large-scale effort and a strong awareness of the desires of the student body—so start planning early. "To make an event successful, it has to be huge, with huge publicity and a lot of influential people on campus involved," Eastman says. "You also want to plan events students will really want to be involved in—things they won't think are corny."

If having 8,000 participants is any indicator, the **University of Kentucky** SG hit the mark in finding such an event. In fall 2001, SG worked closely with university administration to sponsor its first massive street party, "Gator Roast," the night before the football game against the **University of Florida**. "It was probably the most profound on-campus experience at UK in 20 years," says Justin Rasner, SG chief of staff.

To include more students, SG held the party on a large street block close to the town's downtown area. Aside from a local band, the UK marching band, cheerleaders, the athletic director, and football fans, Rasner says he noticed a wide variety of students in attendance. "I've never seen such a diverse group intermingling," he says.

### Now It's Your Turn

Interested in starting a similar campus-wide tradition? Take a deep breath, gather your courage, and be willing to do what it takes. "If you're starting something new, don't think it'll be easy," Rasner says. "Be brave, be bold, and say, 'We're going to do this, and we're going to do it big.' Above all, always remember the reason why you're working so hard to plan these kind of events—to bring different students together." 

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