Planning a Conference

Planning a conference is really not as complicated as it may appear. If you plan to host a conference, approach this task as you would any large program—with careful planning and proper organization. This handout is designed to help you with this process—from determining who your audience is, to picking a theme, making all arrangements and finally evaluating the success of the conference from both the participants’ and presenters’ point of view.

Determining an Audience
Generally, student organizations coordinate either a campus wide conference or a regional conference. Consider if the conference is open to members only, members and guests, officers only, advisors, or the entire student body. When determining your audience, consider what types of issues, topic and programs would be of interest to them. This is also the opportune time to determine an estimate of conference attendance.

Choosing an Appropriate Date
1. Campus-wide conferences should be scheduled when there are no other major events going on campus. Be sure to allow adequate time for publicity, give students enough time to readjust to SD Mines and allow for any last minute planning that might arise.
2. Check with other student organizations and departments regarding traditional events that are planned such as M-Week, Fraternity/Sorority Events, etc. You can visit the University Calendar, Mines Link, and Surbeck Scheduling for information on what is planned.
3. Avoid Scheduling during home sporting events and three day weekends.
4. There is a great deal more flexibility during the winter term, but be aware of winter break, mid-terms, and finals. Also, for any conferences scheduled during the winter months, prepare an alternate plan in case of inclement weather.
5. Check the calendar for major religious events and other holidays.
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Choosing a Theme
1. Although it is preferred, it is not necessary, to have a conference theme. Is there a common theme running throughout the conference? Can you come up with a catchy title/logo to go with it? When applicable, consider past themes, if continuity and recognition is desired.
2. If you can’t decide on a theme right away, use your creative energies for more important things such as session titles and special activities.
3. When you do come up with a theme, include it on all written materials, Hint: the way a theme is carried out is more important than the actual theme itself.

Gathering Financial Support
1. Forming a budget
   a. Make a detailed budget and keep your ledgers current.
   b. Indicated donated items and estimated cost from the donor. All items need to be recorded as actual costs of putting on the conference.
   c. Indicated any anticipated revenue and projected revenue.
2. Determine if you need co-sponsors
   a. Any person or group associated with your conference will reflect on the conference and your organization.
   b. You can request a simple money donate or materials and services (such as paper, copying, pens, name tags, etc.).
   c. Determine what the co-sponsors will receive in return. Many companies are interested in name recognition with student leaders and student groups. Give them ideas of how their name will be visible during the conference.
   d. Acknowledging sponsors and donors in the conference program is very important. Consider inviting sponsors to parts of the program.
3. Donations
   a. Brainstorm all the possible materials and services you need in order to put on a successful conference. This will help you get organized, give you an idea of costs to include in your budget and help you figure out who to approach for donations.
   b. There are many items that can be donated-copying, telephone usage, paper, office supplies, name tags, pencils or pens, typing, prizes, etc.
   c. Before contacting companies, or SD Mines Alumni for donations, you must visit with the SD Mines Foundation about fundraising policies.
4. Consider a registration fee
   a. If you decide to charge participants a registration fee to attend, consider the costs of planning the entire conference and then determine what the fee will cover (which should be shared with participants) such as meals, materials, facility rental, etc.
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b. Be reasonable. Ask yourself what the average student or student organization would comfortably pay to attend this conference.

Finding the Best Facilities

1. When choosing a location, ask yourself if people can get there easily from campus? Is there ample parking? Is it accessible to people with disabilities? Will an interpreter be needed?
2. Find out what other things are happening within the building that might distract from the conference.
3. Are there fees involved for using the facilities and do they include tables, chairs, projects, screens, etc.?
4. Is there a place for a central headquarters for registration, information tables, a message board, etc.?
5. Will you need special phones hooked up? Can this be accommodated? Do you have specific power requirements for computers, equipment?
6. Are there restrictions regarding food service? Do you have to use the building’s services or can you use outside catering?

Program Planning

1. Topics
   a. Choosing the topics for your session/workshop is a challenge. Brainstorm possible session topics and titles (depending on perceived participant needs). Prioritize to determine which topics would be better received and well attended.
   b. Decide how long you would like each session to be, then determine how many sessions you have time to offer. Remember to consider how many participants you can reasonably expect to attend the conference.
   c. Most successful conference planners limit themselves to no more than three sessions and one keynote per day. You can offer more than one topic per time period and you can offer the same session/workshop at different times.

2. Scheduling
   a. The placement of each session is very important. First, choose those topics that can be offered more than once. Then decide if it is better to place the most popular session early to draw people in and risk latecomers or sleepysheads- or place them later in more prime time slots.
   b. Be sure to allow sufficient time for each session. It is very difficult to adequately present a session in less than one hour.
   c. Allow for a ten to fifteen minute break between sessions to allow for running over and time to get from place to place.

3. Facilitators
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a.