

Positive Expectations: Engaging New Teammates

Welcoming new teammates should focus on the positive aspects of team membership – developing athletic abilities, leadership skills and persisting through challenge. You want new members of your team to feel like they worked hard to achieve something great—the privilege of representing your school and contributing to a winning team. Review the guide below to plan activities that can provide healthy challenges for your new recruiting class to achieve their personal best on and off the field while making sure activities don't involve hazing.

Step 1: Think about what you want new teammates to learn/achieve. How do the activities relate to your team's goals?

Possible Goals for Recruiting Class Activities

- Encourage individual leadership development
- Promote adjustment to college life
- Build respect for each individual
- Stimulate intellectual growth
- Promote social skills
- Promote positive team culture
- Provide an environment where all teammates can express their opinions safely
- Promote friendship among the entire team
- Promote an understanding of the value of athletics
- Value team needs over individual needs

Step 2: What activities and events can safely accomplish the goal(s)? See ideas on the next page.

Step 3: Evaluate the options and select an activity.

- Talk with other teammates to determine interest level. Don't assume what your team will or won't be interested in doing. You may be surprised!

Step 4: Focus on activities that involve the entire team as a way to build unity across classes. Make it clear to participants that all activities are "challenge by choice," meaning that each person feels comfortable not participating should the activity be too challenging for them. Anything that is excessively challenging does not help people learn. It actually results in the opposite—they shut down. If teammates are afraid to say 'no' they can't really consent to an activity.

Step 5: Lead a discussion following the activity to talk about what everyone learned. Help make connections with your team's goals and culture. This is the most important part of the activity! Sample questions include:

- What was challenging about this activity?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What would you do differently if you could do it over?
- What did you learn about the team?
- How does this relate to being a new member of the team?
- How can you take what you learned and apply it to the team?

Note: Do not do any physical activities without a trained guide, athletic trainer or facilitator with you.

Goal: Leadership Development

- Invite staff from your student activities/engagement office to meet with the team to give an overview of programs and/or provide a leadership presentation.
- Ask new teammates to identify someone on the team they think is a leader (not necessarily the captains!) Interview the person to learn more about their background and personal goals. Present a five-minute summary before practice or on the bus as you travel for competition.
- Work with athletics student-athlete development staff, campus student activities/engagement staff or the campus community service clearinghouse to plan a community service event to benefit a local school or non-profit.
- Schedule someone from your campus Career Center to talk with the team about how to market skills gained from athletic participation when applying for a job or graduate school.
- Invite recent alumni teammates to talk (in person or through Zoom) about what they gained from their sport and offer advice. Include a Q&A at the end!

Goal: Self Knowledge

- Ask each rookie to interview a current team member. Ask them to talk about what the team and sport means to them, what their athletic and scholastic goals are and how they will positively contribute to the team this season.
- Ask parents to send a letter of support to their son/daughter as a surprise. Give the letters to everyone before the first home competition.
- Invite a faculty or staff member to teach mindfulness, building resilience or other topics relevant to the team and the benefit of mindfulness to athletic performance.
- As a team, attend a program on diversity, equity and inclusion or request a campus office to present to your team.

Goal: Team Relationship Building

- After clearing the activity with your coaches and trainers, schedule with campus recreation for a climbing training class, GPS orienteering challenge, or time on the challenge course. On the challenge course, mental and physical team-building activities are conducted by a trained facilitator. These activities also develop team unity, leadership and conflict management skills. You may need to clear this activity with your athletic trainers. **Note:** Do not do physical activities without a trained guide or facilitator with you.
- Take a hike together as a team.
- Divide the team into two groups. Give each group a box full of miscellaneous materials, including paper, markers, tape, scissors, etc. Give everyone one hour to devise a competitive game using all of the items (only rules: everyone must play, no alcohol, and no risk of injury). Have each group play the other team's game.
- Have new team members compete against current members in a different sport (bowling, croquet, pickleball, etc.) using their non-dominant limbs.

Goal: Accountability

- Schedule a team training on bystander intervention. People who understand the bystander effect are more likely to act and keep people safe.
- Have the captain(s) talk with rookies about their competition goals for the year. Then ask the rookies to come up with a plan for how they will help to achieve it.
- Ensure that equipment clean-ups are for all members, not just rookies.
- Work with athletics student-athlete development staff, campus student activities/engagement staff or the campus community service clearinghouse to participate in a community service event to benefit a local school or non-profit.

Adapted from materials developed at Worcester Polytechnic Institute