Determining the Experiences of Student Leaders Who Participate in the Event Planning Process and Event Planning (SOLID) Training

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. Review of the Literature
3. Methodology
4. Results and Findings
5. Discussion
Introduction
Introduction

- Office of Event Services
  - Reserving space, risk management, technology needs
- Department of Student Activities
  - SOLID Training
Goal

To better inform participating offices on the effectiveness of the event planning and training process to deliver a better overall event planning experience for students.
Research Questions

What are the experiences and perceptions of student organization officers in the event planning process?

What are the experiences and perceptions of student organization officer in the event planning (SOLID) training?
Literature Review
Student Organizations

- Why be involved?
  - Students find fulfillment through participating in activities outside the classroom and being a part of a larger community (Bloland, 1987, p. 293)
  - Millennial Generation (Howe, 2005, p. 18-19)
- Implications (Reisberg, 2000)
  - Increased diversity
  - Individuality and competition
Experiential Learning

- Organizational event planning (Bee, Montante, Lanigan, Andrejak & Grabowski, 2011)
  - Ownership
  - Responsibility
  - Internalize knowledge
- Repetition and practice
  → Experiential learning cycle
Event Planning Process

- Event planning has been acknowledged as an important set of skills (Cecil, Reed, & Reed, 2011)
  - Brainstorming, communication skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, risk management → transferrable skills
  - Working with advisors
    - Budgets; paperwork
  - Preparedness, assessment
The College Union

“The College Union represents a well-considered plan for the community life of the college that yields to varying perspectives on the role of the college union on campus.”

(Rudisille, Stringer & Thiebe, 2012).
College Unions

Getting Involved
Host events
Hub of Information
Needed Services
## Peer & Aspirant Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arizona State University</th>
<th>University of Michigan</th>
<th>The College of William &amp; Mary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Institute of Technology</td>
<td>University of Oregon</td>
<td>Indiana University</td>
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<td>Montana State University</td>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>The Ohio State University</td>
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<td>Providence College</td>
<td>University of Colorado-Boulder</td>
<td>Purdue University</td>
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<td>Temple University</td>
<td>University of Florida</td>
<td>University of Arizona</td>
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<td>University of Kansas</td>
<td>University of Minnesota</td>
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<td>University of Delaware</td>
<td>UMass-Amherst</td>
<td>University of Rhode Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
<td>UCONN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clients of Event Services Offices

- Student Organizations
- University Departments
- Off-Campus Constituents
Who can reserve space?

13 schools

Any student in an organization

11 schools

Officers or certain designees
Electronic Event Management

- 15 schools
- 3 schools
- 6 schools

Event Management System (EMS)

EMS in progress

Resource 25/25 Live, Ungerbook, Scheduler Plus, CollegiateLink
Student Organization Event Planning Training

- Required: 12 institutions
- None: 9 institutions
- Optional: 3 institutions
Event Services & Student Activities

- 50% indicated that these two offices partner to plan and implement events
- Shared responsibilities:
  - Training students
  - Advising
Student Union Mission

“As an integral part of the educational mission of the University of Connecticut, the Student Union provides program support, services, facilities, and amenities for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and guests.”

(University of Connecticut, 2013a)
Event Services Office

- **Facilitates** the event planning process for programs and activities that occur **within** the Student Union
- Frequent **collaboration** with the Involvement Office and the Programs Office
2012-2013

Student Union Users

Registered Student Organizations 63%
University Departments 27%
Affiliated University Groups 2%
Non-Affiliated Groups 4%
Vendors 4%
Event Services Office

- Uses **EMS**
  - 21 spaces
- **600+** Student Organizations
- **180+** University Departments
- **25** Vendors
- **12,522** events in 2012-2013
  - 32 different event types
SOLID Goals

**Student Organization Leaders Intentional Development**

1. To help student organizations achieve their goals
2. To develop student leadership knowledge and skills
3. To ensure student awareness of University policies and resources
4. To promote responsibility, respect, and positive experiences
SOLID Training

- Chief Operating Officer (COO)
- Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
- Secretary (SEC)
- Event Coordinator (EVC)
- Began in 2007
- 30-60 minutes in length
- **18 Event Coordinator Sessions** in Spring 2014
  - *Latest* start time: 5pm
  - *Earliest* start time: 10am
- PowerPoint → Prezi
SOLID—EVC

“Learn knowledge and skills to plan and hold effective events”

(UConn Department of Student Activities, 2013b)
Organization Status

- In order to remain an **active** organization, officer information must be updated on **UConntact**.
- **All officers** must be **SOLID** trained for their respective position.
- If not all officers are trained but are listed on **UConntact**, the organization will be **frozen**.
- Frozen organizations lose **all reservations made**.
RSO Rep. sends a request for space for a program in the ESO

ESO staff review request and check status if RSO is SOLID compliant

If YES, put requested space on hold and send student to the P.O. for advisement and event registration

RSO Rep. makes appt. to meet with a Program Advisor to go over details and get Event Registration form signed off

RSO Rep. hands in a signed Event Registration form to ESO

RSO makes appt. with staff to go over logistical details 1 month prior to event

Reservation is confirmed and program happens

RSO = Registered Student Organization
ESO = Event Services Office
I.O. = Involvement Office
P.O. = Programs Office
SOLID = Student Organization Leaders Intentional Development
Methodology
Methodology

- Convergent Parallel Model
- Utilizes both quantitative and qualitative measures in order to gather more complete data on student experiences
- Triangulation
Setting

- University of Connecticut-Storrs
  - Large, public, four-year research university
- Enrollment size for **Fall 2013**
  - 18,032 undergraduates
  - 7,879 graduates
Student Organizations

- **653** active Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) that are classified into 16 different categories
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RSO Categories</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Club Sports</th>
<th>Residence Hall Councils</th>
<th>Politics &amp; Activism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Environmental/Agricultural/Animals</td>
<td>Graduate Student Organizations</td>
<td>Religion &amp; Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Fraternities/Sororities</td>
<td>Health &amp; Fitness</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Creation &amp; Programming</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Performing &amp; Visual Arts</td>
<td>Special Interest/Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants

1,730 RSO Officers*

FOCUS GROUPS
• 858 invited
• 2 participated

INTERVIEWS
• 869 invited
• 16 participated

SURVEY
• 1,730 invited
• 243 participated**

*506 were EVCs

**Confidence interval for survey 95%, ±6%
Data Collection

- **Survey**
  - Gathered quantitative and qualitative data through **18 questions**
  - Sent through CampusLabs

- **Interviews & Focus Group**
  - Participants were asked a series of **7 questions** about SOLID training and the event planning process
Data Analysis

- Interviews and focus group had recorded responses that were transcribed *verbatim* and each student investigator received a copy of the complete data set to code.
- Quantitative data was analyzed using *descriptive statistics*.
Each interview, focus group, and open-ended survey question was coded independently by two investigators. Coded responses were compared to ensure consistency and validity.
Results & Findings
Results & Findings

Event Services
- Process
- Space & Accommodations
- Communication
- Staff

SOLID
- Training Logistics
- Relevancy
- Inter/Intra-Organization
- Content
- Staff
Quantitative Event Services Results
What types of events has your organization planned?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Type</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings/Practices</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large-Scale Events</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Events*</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraisers</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performances/Concerts</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabling</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Smaller events are those events that are planned just for members of an organization but are more involved than a regularly scheduled meeting.

n = 108 respondents with 176 responses
Reservation of Space

Have any of the registered student organizations you are in held events or meetings without officially reserving space?

- I don’t know
- No
- Yes

Events: 25 (I don’t know), 167 (No), 42 (Yes)
Meetings: 17 (I don’t know), 122 (No), 94 (Yes)
Have you ever filled out the post-event evaluation sheet that Event Services in the Student Union sends out after events?

- Yes: 15%
- No: 70%
- I don't know: 15%

n = 233 respondents
Event Planning Process

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

- Event planning process is efficient
- Event planning process is effective
- Meeting scheduling process is efficient
- Meeting scheduling process is fair
Event Planning Process

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Event planning process is efficient
Event planning process is effective
Meeting scheduling process is efficient
Meeting scheduling process is fair
Event Planning Process

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- Event planning process is efficient
- Event planning process is effective
- Meeting scheduling process is efficient
- Meeting scheduling process is fair
**Perception of Process**

What is the strongest part of the event planning/meeting scheduling process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer service/ Employees</th>
<th>41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online form</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized/Fast responses</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good/easy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This survey</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A or Unsure</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 94 respondents with 103 responses
What is the weakest part of the event planning/meeting scheduling process?

- Availability of space: 28
- Complicated/confusing process: 25
- Speed of room confirmations: 20
- Communication (b/n depts or w/ students): 19
- Lack of guidance: 6
- Inability to make changes to reservations: 5
- Issues with room setup or A/V: 4
- No weak parts: 9
- N/A or unsure: 8

n = 96 respondents with 124 responses
Qualitative Event Services Findings
Overall sense of bureaucracy
Perceive many obstacles to success
Process feels very back and forth

“For a large scale event it can be very difficult to get a meeting with the Programs Office and then go down to Event Services... I need to set up a meeting time and sit down for 10 minutes to figure out when we can actually meet and then those meetings often end up being 5 minutes.”
Theme: Process

- **Timeliness** of confirm reservation
- Perceived **lack of flexibility** in making changes to room reservations
- **Lack of reliability** in room reservations event after receiving a room confirmation

“*When we went to the room that we had confirmation for, another group was already using the room.*”
Theme: Space & Accommodations

- Overall perceived lack of spaces available to reserve for events or meetings
- High traffic areas, within the Student Union, are especially difficult to reserve
Theme: Space & Accommodations

- **Unaware** of rooms available for reservation outside of the Union

  “…leaders who are confused as to whether they book the rooms in the School of Business through the Business School or through the office in the Union…”

- **Transparency** of rooms available strongly desired
Theme: Space & Accommodations

- Type of room desired is not always available for students to use

  “[We] have requested a lecture hall but ended up getting a small room in family studies which is not really conducive to what we needed but unfortunately there is no way for us to change it.”

- Accommodations availability and cost unclear
Theme: Communication

- Lack of **transparency** and **communication** regarding policies and policy changes
- **Miscommunication** of reservations leads to impromptu events and meetings

“...want to find a quiet room to have that in and it’s extremely difficult to find that space unless we just decide to show up at a classroom building and try to find a room that’s open.”
Theme: Communication

- Perceived **lack of communication** between staff, offices and students.
- Most efficient way to receive answers or assistance is **in person** at the office.

“There is a lot of knowledge when you go straight to the office, but not all students will be able to go to the office during the work day.”
Theme: Staff

- Staff perceived as helpful, friendly and accessible
- Want success for students

“They want to see students' events to be successful so it’s always awesome to go into the office and do that.”

- Overall positive experience
Theme: Staff

- Discrepancies between student staff and professional staff responses
- Importance of building social capital
- Perceived notion of favoritism

“So I run to the office of Event Services...there’s like 3 people waiting in line but I just walk past them...”
Quantitative SOLID Results
I had event planning experience before I planned events at UConn through the Student Union.

- University Departments: 30%
- Registered Student Organizations: 70%

I had event planning training before I went to SOLID Event Planning Training.

- Yes: 4%
- No: 96%

n = 133 respondents
Perception

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

1. Confident event planner BEFORE SOLID
2. Confident event planner AFTER SOLID
3. I know what event planning resources are available to me as a result of attending SOLID
4. I know where I can go to get help planning an event as a result of SOLID
5. SOLID Event Planning Training was helpful

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
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[Graph showing percentage levels for each statement with categories from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree]
Perception

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

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Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
Qualitative SOLID Findings
Theme: Training Logistics

- Trainings offered at inconvenient times
- Sessions were overcrowded
- Good length and format of presentation

“...if you’re not comfortable, I feel like you are not even fully paying attention.”
Theme: Relevancy

- Perceived as good in theory with helpful points
- Level of preparedness after SOLID perceived as basic or not prepared at all
- Knew where to go and who to speak to if they had questions

“If I could use one word to sum it up, I would call it basic.”
Theme: Inter/Intra-Organization

- Desired better sense of communication and timeline for student organizations
- No inter-role training
- No interaction among student leaders at workshop

“...I think it would be beneficial to hold an overall workshop for all of the leaders to go to so that they can figure out how all of these positions interact...”
Theme: Content

- Desire for **specialized** Event Planning SOLID workshops with regard to organization **type**
- No distinction between large- and small-scale events
- Desire for easy access to resources **online**

“It would be helpful if packets were given to us as we walked in, because the leader speaks fast, and if all the content were available **online**. I know that general information is available under “Documents”, but I would prefer …event planning-specific **information**.”
Theme: Staff

- Staff are perceived as helpful and knowledgeable
- Staff are perceived as unengaged and boring
- Efficient sessions by speeding through material and assuming prior knowledge

“...it was interesting because the person who ran it didn’t really seem interested in being there and the training was a little bit boring because of that.”
Discussion
Event Planning Process
Key Point: Available Space

- **Lack** of available space
- **Academic space**
  - Student *concerns* with the process
  - Over 40% of student groups have held meetings *without* reserving space
Key Point: Transparency

- Students dissatisfied with lack of ability to see what rooms are available and at what times
- Online vs. Personal Interactions
Key Point: Officer Transitions

- Issues remaining an “active” organization during officer transitions
- Loss of reservations if an organization gets “frozen”
- Need for increased communication around best practices for transitions to not lose reservations
Key Point: Reservation Responsibility

- Four officers: COO, CFO, SEC, EVC
- Each organization has **different needs**
- Not every officer plans events
- **Lack of flexibility** to make changes to reservations
Key Point: Communication

- Event Services → Event Services
- Event Services → Programs Office
- Event Services → Registrar
Key Point: Communication

- Event Services → Event Services
- Event Services → Programs Office
- Event Services → Registrar
Key Point: Communication

- Event Services → Event Services
- Event Services → Programs Office
- Event Services → Registrar
Discussion
SOLID Training
Key Point: Content

- Helpful and informative
- Broad
- Relevancy
  - Not always relevant for organizations
  - Assumptions are made about prior knowledge and applicability
Key Point: Presentation

- Presentation should be more engaging and tailored to participants in the room
- An outline of process should be provided
- Key points or information should be emphasized
Key Point: Follow Up

- Presentations and handouts should be available post SOLID training for students as resources
- Trial and error process
Conclusions

- Students are **satisfied** with the process and the staff involved.
- There is a strong desire for further **transparency** and use of **technology**.
- There is a desire for **customizable** training and **follow up** throughout the process.
Recommendations for Future Practice

- Full implementation of EMS
- Streamlined process and better communication with offices involved
- Clarification, flexibility, and transparency when booking rooms (Union and Academic spaces)
- SOLID – Presentation customizable and engaging
- Follow up throughout the process after completion of SOLID training including the availability of resources
Limitations

- Small, **specialized** sample size
- **Unique** survey instrument
- All RSO categories were **not** represented
- Event planning is **not** limited to ‘Event Planners’
- **Updated** process and SOLID training
Potential for Further Research & Assessment at UConn

- Explicit surveying of the event planning experience
- Staff and faculty advisor perceptions of the process
- Demographic information of student organization type and student involvement
Questions?


