

Orienting the *MySpace* Generation

by Missy McElprang Cummins

As a young administrator, I've planned the traditional Freshman Orientation programs to try and "get students involved" only to be disappointed with low turn-out or lack of attention. I've determined it's not that they aren't interested – it's that I've failed to find the appropriate ways to include them in the program.

The current generation of students are often referred to as the "*MySpace* Generation" or "Generation @" – and for good reason. In the past, when I've hosted Freshman Orientation events, the students would spend most of the time text messaging their friends or fidgeting with their iPods. Instead of being frustrated, I decided I needed to provide an opportunity for these students to experience campus in an environment and media in which they were familiar. Enter Freshman Orientation – *MySpace* style.

At Idaho State University, students in one section of First Year Seminar are becoming involved with their campus by using *MySpace*. The students in these groups use *MySpace* to document their first year at ISU. Each group is given a list of campus resources to find. When they find this resource, they take a picture of it, download it on their group's *MySpace* page, and then add a caption for each picture. In the caption, the groups identify why this is a valuable resource for freshmen and mention anything unusual or interesting about that resource. The students are also required to reflect on their first year experiences by posting blogs. The project is due at the end of the semester.

Although this may appear to be a fairly lengthy assignment, students are participating, enjoying themselves, meeting new friends, and best of all – orienting themselves to campus and college life.

MySpace is not the silver bullet for Freshman Orientation programming. However, instead of becoming frustrated when students don't participate in the traditional class programming, I challenge you to try something new. Try to find ways to include students in the ways they want to be included and use an environment/media in which they are familiar.

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