



## 8.6 Generating and Maintaining Interest

The best methods for generating and maintaining interest in the Student Leadership Council are going to be different for each center. However, in all cases those methods should be guided by three intertwining principles: value, respect, and ownership.

- **Value**

For students to have interest in their SLC, they have to see the SLC as something that benefits them. The easiest way to provide value to students initially is of course by giving them free food, and an SLC event without free food is a poorly attended one. However, other methods are required for encouraging more than just attendance.

In general, greater participation deserves greater rewards. A student who has contributed time and effort to the SLC and is overall having a positive impact on the whole center should be given more rewards and opportunities than a student who shows up to an SLC event twice a year. These rewards can take any form that the SLC sees fit, from gift cards to travel awards to project funding. If students see that being on the leadership council is a lot of hard work with little appreciation, they will take their talents and energies elsewhere.

However, this philosophy does not mean ignoring uninvolved students. The SLC must also represent and advocate for all of the ERC's students. When any student has a complaint concerning the center, the SLC has an obligation to investigate and respond. A single voice is easily silenced, but the power of the SLC is the unity of its members. Therefore, an SLC that neglects its responsibilities is worthless to its members and to the other ERC students. This same principle holds on the positive side as well; the SLC can be instrumental in communicating positive features of the ERC to engineering students, including those already involved in the ERC and those who are not.

- **Respect**

Students are people too; and of all organizations, the SLC is one that cannot afford to forget this. Students are the fundamental building blocks of each ERC, and disgruntled students weaken the whole center. The SLC must respect their member students, and especially their students' time. Graduate students are a busy lot, and if they perceive that the SLC is wasting their valuable time, they will disregard it as a trivial distraction at best, or a dreary requirement at worst.

Therefore, the SLC must take care of how it presents itself. Should an activity be mandatory, or should it be an optional opportunity for the member students? Students respond more favorably to events that are beneficial but optional than to mandatory events of dubious value, so the number of events that are absolutely required for each student should be minimized. If turnout remains low, the SLC should re-evaluate those events: Is this what the students want, and if not, what do they want??

- **Ownership**

The natural continuation of the previous two principles is that, if they are consistently observed, students will begin to feel a sense of ownership over the SLC. The SLC member students must feel that this organization is *their* SLC for it to flourish. If students think of the SLC as *their* own group instead of an external organization--as *their* interface with the center administration and the NSF, and as a reflection and representation of *themselves*, they will be interested in the SLC and will participate actively.

As such, each student must be free to voice their thoughts about the SLC. They should not find the SLC disorganized or chaotic; established bylaws should lend structure and purpose. The center administration should treat the SLC in a hands-off manner, but it is still up to the students to make the SLC theirs.



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At this point, it must be stressed that these ideas are nothing if the average student never hears about them. Communication is essential, from the leadership council to the ERC students and vice versa. Center administration does not always communicate the center's goals and philosophies to the students. It is often up to the leadership council to give the center's students a sense of cohesion and direction. How this communication should be conducted can be coordinated with the center leadership to avoid mixed messages and redundant efforts. It is also a good opportunity for the SLC to recruit members of the council from among the ERC students.

Special care must be taken for centers that are spread out over multiple campuses. When a large number of students are at one campus, it becomes logistically simpler to tailor events to that main campus. However, this practice excludes students at the branch campuses. Each campus must have a campus representative who will organize local events at their respective campuses. These representatives will ensure that their local peers are receiving a fair share of the SLC's benefits, creating and sustaining a local ERC community, so that no student will feel that, "The SLC is just for those other students." (See the following section 8.7 for more discussion of this topic.) Ultimately, when the SLC is useful to all of its members and treats them with respect, the students will be interested and active in their organization.

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