TITLE: Middlebury College Student Government Association’s Position on Orientation Trips for Incoming First-Years

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Whereas, the purpose of an Orientation Trip is to introduce incoming first-years to the natural and cultural landscape of Vermont, to orient them to college social life, and also to provide trip leaders with real-world leadership opportunities,

Whereas, MiddView (a program, established in 2008, was designed to provide Outdoor/Interest Orientation Trips for all interested incoming first-years) was cut entirely from the Middlebury College Financial Budget;

Whereas, the past Middlebury Outdoor Orientation (MOO) and the Orientation for New Kids (OINK) programs were also abandoned;

Whereas, the Middlebury College student body has demonstrated strong and collective support for Orientation Trips for first-year students, as has been demonstrated through various sources including an online survey in the fall of 2009. In a survey of 531 students, 75% of the surveyed students supported or strongly supported the use of the student activities fee for an orientation program for incoming first-years (54% gave a 5 out of 5 score and 21% gave a 4 out of 5 score). The statement read: “Do you support reviving the MiddView program with partial funding from the Student Activities fee?” Anonymous comments focused on a few specific issues:

1. Funding Source:
   • “I would prefer it to be covered by a combination of the endowment/donations/comprehensive fee, but it is ESSENTIAL that we bring back the full MOO/MiddView.”

2. Decision to Attend Middlebury College
   • “MOO was honestly one of the factors that played an important role in my decision to come here. I feel that not only are we cheating incoming students out of a great opportunity, but also decreasing our desirability as an institution without some kind of orientation.”
   • “One of the main reasons why I chose to attend MC was because of the MiddView component. It showed me that Middlebury College was not just an academic institution, and rather my new home – a whole community. MiddView connotes a lively, enthusiastic atmosphere and creates bonds that may not occur normally. For me, I still keep in contact with my MiddView friends.

3. Positive Experience with Trips Programs
   • “I had a great time on my hiking trip during MiddView and feel as though it was an integral part of my first-year experience. I am still very close with various members of my MOO group!”
   • “MiddView was the defining experience of my introduction and what gave me confidence upon entering college. I did not receive any benefits from the planned introduction following, but thought that MiddView was really where my trepidation entering school waned.”

4. Timing of the Orientation Trips
   • “I think there should be introduction trips before the actual school calendar begins. More people should be allowed to participate and there should be a greater range of activities.”
   • “OINK this year was an incredible experience and I’m sure MOO was as well. The only things that I would change would be having it available to everyone and having it BEFORE classes begin.”

Second, student support has also been demonstrated via the subsequent SGA funding of OINK through the Student Activities Fee Budget. Furthermore, this program was run primarily through the student-run organization - The Middlebury College Mountain Club (MMC);
Whereas, incoming first-year students benefit significantly from Outdoor/Interest Orientation Trips;

Whereas, an Orientation Trips Program run prior to the standard on-campus orientation is a necessity for reducing attrition rates of leaders and participants and for longer trips;

Whereas, the SGA recognizes the high cost of MiddView, the SGA would recommend a reassessment of the MiddView model for increased monetary savings;

Whereas, the SGA in 2009 provided $47,000 per year for three years to support an OINK model for Orientation Trips (this included the 2010 introduction and will include the 2011 and the 2012 introductions);

Whereas, running an Orientation Trips Program through a student organization (the Middlebury Mountain Club or others) is not an efficient long-term solution for a viable and consistent Program and should instead be supported organizationally through the College;

Whereas, the Student Government Association supports a return to a full-scale Outdoor/Interest Orientation Trips Program where all interested students can participate;

Whereas, Orientation Trips exist at all of our peer institutions and at none of them were the programs cut in response to the economic crisis. Now therefore be it

Enacted,

That the Orientation Trips Program be funded jointly through the SGA and the College Administration and fit within one of these three models:

1. **Pre-orientation, Optional:** An optional pre-orientation program would be most similar to the MOO and MiddView model that brought participants to campus before the start of orientation. This program would need sufficient capacity to accommodate all who wish to participate.
   - The estimated cost for each participant is around $250.
   - This model would allow the charging of a participant fee ($150-$175).
   - To ensure equity, this option would need a financial aid plan.
   - Assuming 400 first years elected to participate, and accounting for financial aid and revenue from participant fees, the program cost to the College would be around $45,000. The total cost of the program would be around $100,000. The fee revenue would be around $55,000 (assuming a full pay fee of $175, and a financial aid fee of $25, with 25% aid participation).
   - This option requires an earlier campus opening to accommodate leader training, early arrival of first year participants (dinning costs, facilities services costs, staff overtime pay).

2. **Embedded Within Orientation, Optional:** An optional orientation embedded program would be similar to option one, but would avoid the costs of opening the campus early and would not require first-year students and parents to arrive on campus before orientation. This program would need sufficient capacity to accommodate all who wish to participate. Information:
   - The estimated cost for each participant is around $250.
   - This model would allow the charging of a participant fee ($150-$175).
   - To ensure equity, this option would need a financial aid plan.
   - Assuming 400 first years elected to participate, and accounting for financial aid and revenue from participant fees, the program cost to the College would be around $45,000. The total cost of the Program would be around $100,000. The fee revenue would be around $55,000 (assuming a full pay fee of $175, and a financial aid fee of $25, with 25% aid participation).
     - Likely to be less expensive to the College in total as costs could be allocated from the general orientation program to the Orientation Trips Program.
   - The Program would require significant changes to be made to the current general orientation, and may require the addition of an entire day to the orientation plan and methods for students to opt out of the program.
3. **Embedded within orientation, Mandatory:** An Orientation Embedded Mandatory Program would require all incoming first years to participate in one of the Orientation Trips. This option is more expensive for the College/SGA, because it involves larger participant numbers, and participants would not be charged a fee for participation. However, this program would save money through embedding the trips within orientation and is likely to be the most efficient and effective at introducing incoming first-years to the natural and cultural landscape of Vermont. It may also be the best way to foster long lasting connections and friendships between group members, as the first-years within a trip group could become acquainted during general orientation and establish closer connections during the orientation trips.

- The estimated cost for each participant is around $250.
- This model would NOT allow the charging of a participant fee.
- The entire program cost would be paid by the SGA/College and assuming 600 participants, the program would cost approximately $150,000.
- This model would require significant changes to the current general orientation model and could save money for the General Orientation:
  - May need to add an entire day to the orientation plan.
  - Costs could be allocated from the General Orientation program to the Orientation Trips Program.
- This option could provide the ideal form of an orientation experience to all first years.
  - Students would arrive to campus all at one time and participate in General Orientation events and then, students would break into smaller groups for a trips-based orientation experience.
  - This model would provide first-years an initial introduction to their class followed with a trip experience where they can meet and become connected with peers and mentors.

Enacted,

That the Middlebury College SGA will work with the College Administration to establish and jointly fund an Outdoor/Interest Orientation Trips Program with the requirements:
- That all models are need blind to ensure equal access to the program regardless of a student’s financial situation and that financial aid is provided,
- That the program allows for students athletes to participate in the Orientation trips if possible,
- That all models provide any necessary certifications (including Wilderness First Aid) and training for outdoor/interest trip leaders to protect Middlebury College from serious legal liability,
- That, starting in 2013, the SGA provides $25,000 to partially fund Options 1 or 2. OR: If the Finance Committee determines that the Student Activities Fee rollovers are capable of supporting additional funding, the SGA will provide $75,000 to partially fund Option 3.

Notes,

- The SGA is willing to work with the College Administration to find a model that best fits the ideals of Middlebury College, and also functions logistically within the current orientation program.
- The SGA would like to emphasize the values behind Option 3, and would like to focus on this model – providing that the College Administration and the Student Activities fee are able to fund the program.
- Upon an agreement between the SGA and the College Administration, the official name for the newly restructured Orientation Trips Program will be determined.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anne Runkel
Tina Williamson
Tony Huynh
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**LEGISLATIVE ACTION**

*Originally proposed.*

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