

### Extended Orientation Events Fall 2011

The motivation for Extended Orientation (E-OR) came from the observation that important rules of community presented during Orientation in 2010 seemed to have been lost in the crush of information presented at that time. In particular, concern was raised about several disciplinary incidents related to the honor code violations among first year students early in the Fall 2010 semester.

Four events took place during the first four weeks of the Fall 2011 semester. The first three were cornerstone discussions related to our Honor Code and the last program was meant to feature the Counseling Center and was on Resilience.

- The first event, "*Intellectual Honesty*" featured Lawrence Douglas, Professor of Law, Social Thought, and Jurisprudence who discussed intellectual property and how the trust and respect that education is predicated upon is violated when someone misrepresents the originality of an idea, and E. J. Mills, Head Football Coach, who spoke about the expectation of integrity among members of this community. We followed this with a question and answer period in which Professor Douglas, Coach Mills, Deans Nascembeni and O'Hara took questions from the audience.
- The second event, "*Respect for Persons*", began with a reading "Three Questions" by first year area coordinator Ryan Milov which underscored how each person present may come at these issues from a different place, but that each has something to learn. After a brief puppet interlude, Rick Griffiths, Professor of Classics and Assistant Dean of Faculty, presented the interesting history of the honor code at Amherst College, which was first codified in 1968 with the exhortation to exhibit behavior 'becoming a gentlemen'. Jon Thompson, Head Coach of Lacrosse, followed up with the added responsibility at Amherst College of being sensitive not only to what one means, but also to what another hears. Professor Griffiths and Coach Thompson were joined by Deans O'Hara and Nascembeni for questions and answers.
- In the third event, "*Race and Class in the Classroom*," Carleen Basler, Assistant Professor of Sociology and American Studies, spoke about the need to press the differences among us and to break through the taboos on honestly confronting issues of race and class. She pointed out how diversity of a community in and of itself was useless- it was how we used our diversity that matters. Billy McBride, Asst. Athletic Director-Diversity & Inclusion spoke about how class stratifies even in the way we, at Amherst, each come to learn the silence of the "h" in Amherst. He went on to speak about how each voice is important in the campus discourse, exemplifying this with his own "Rhythm of Leadership" in the performance of the "hambone" dance.
- Our final E-Or event was just before Fall break, at a time we anticipated would be full of student stress and angst. Dr. Jacqueline Bearce, Director of the Counseling Center, introduced the idea of *Resilience* by reporting on medical studies that show how meditation and relaxation lead to better grades and more effective studying. She led the assembly in Johnson Chapel in a two minute exercise students in mind-ful relaxation. Maria Rello, Associate Director of Sports Medicine spoke about how failures were a part of learning, and how we need to learn how to pick ourselves up after a failure. She then elicited several hilarious stories from the group about their own spectacular failures. The evening and the series finished up with an unforgettable story told to us by Emerita Dean of Students Onawumi Jean Moss. Dean Moss left the students with the message that the strength they need to succeed at Amherst College was deep inside them, and each was

charged with reaching down into their soul and finding and honoring this strength. The First Years rewarded her with a standing ovation when she finished off with a rendition of "O, O Child, Things are Goin' to Get Easier." The long line of disciples who gathered afterward to give her personal thanks bore testimony to her effectiveness.

Each discussion was followed by conversation in the residence halls led by the First Year RCs and in Converse Lobby for the Transfer students. For weeks one and two, the speakers organized a set of questions to guide discussion back in the dormitories. In week three, the RCs were asked to guide an honest discussion with their residents about issues of race and class and to ask each student to reflect on where they are and where they need to go. For each of these discussions, we provided pizza and soft drinks for the discussion. In the last week, we provided milk and cookies as part of the final resilience event. The first year first year resident counselors are to be commended for taking on this additional responsibility in a busy time, and doing so with such good will and intelligence.

The E-Or events were made mandatory for all new students following the advice of the student members of our 2011 Orientation Committee. Later this was modified to mandatory for first year students and recommended but not mandatory for transfer students. Attendance was monitored through a card swipe system designed by Dave Irwin from Systems and Networking and administered by Jessica Mestre, Student Life Fellow in the Dean of Students Office. Attendance was quite good: 429 (93%), 393 (84.5%), 404 (87.2%), and 283 (61%) respectively for events 1-4. The names of the attendants (and absentees) were sent to the first year Dean by Wednesday or Thursday after each event and a follow up email was sent to each student who had not attended the event. Four first year students did not attend any E-Or events. They were told in emails that the consequences would not be disciplinary, but that their failure to participate left an impression. By week four, it became much harder to require students to attend due to many student events that were scheduled in that time window (student senate, women's chorus, jazz ensemble, and several courses with evening sections).

Evaluation of the program from the RC staff and the first year students will follow. A self evaluation includes the need to have events scheduled on different nights of the week so as not to impact one group particularly hard (women's chorus and Monday night German course). We need to include faculty and staff from the arts and humanities. We could also do a better job of making faculty aware of the programming so review sessions etc did not get scheduled during these times. Finally, it would be wonderful if we could combine the Dorm talks that follow with the Presidents visits to the First Year Dorms which would be added incentive for First Years to attend.