

Maximizing the Value of Collegiate Conferencing

As your campus evaluates options for the future, Unique Venues encourages you to make certain that conferences and events remain a part of your culture. It is an area often looked at only for its direct revenue contributions, while being undervalued for the many additional direct and indirect benefits it brings to the campus. While we recognize that academics and the residential student experience are core missions and the immediate focus for your campus right now, we encourage you to also consider not only sustaining your conference and events operation but growing it to maximize the potential.

Here are just some of the primary ways a robust conference and events operation helps to fuel the health of a college or university:



Revenue Generation

The most obvious of all impacts, generating auxiliary income is a driving factor for the conference and events program on many campuses. When properly staffed, marketed, and sold, a campus can generate hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars of net revenue to support other institutional priorities and keep student rates as low as possible. The collegiate conferencing industry is a multi-billion-dollar business per year. In 2019, Unique Venues estimates that we processed and sent leads valued at more than \$1.5 billion to campuses in the USA and Canada. This figure does not include leads from other sources such as direct inquiries via directory information for each venue on our website, or referrals within the Unique Venues network of member venues.



Enrollment Marketing

An even more compelling reason to make conferences and events a part of your plan for COVID-19 recovery is its potential impact on new student recruitment. Even before the pandemic, enrollment in 2-year and 4-year institutions has been

on a decline. By providing a high-quality, purpose-driven conference and events experience to potential students, parents of students, and those who are influencers with potential college students, you position your campus to become an option for prospective students who otherwise might not have been in your enrollment pipeline. Research has shown that attendance at an academic or athletic camp or some sort of youth gathering or leadership conference makes a student more likely to consider applying to and enrolling at your institution. Familiarity is a strong marketing tool and can be fostered with internally and externally sponsored programs geared toward the students you desire to have applying to your institution.



Inclusion and Access

A vibrant conference and events program with a mix of internal and external groups opens the doors of your institution to a diverse population of individuals and contributes to the sense of diversity for students, faculty, and staff at the institution. From youth sports camps to pre-college academic programs to professional conferences, all ages, backgrounds, cultures, affiliations, socio-economic standings, and viewpoints can be represented and supported. Programs and events can be developed that specifically target a diverse audience and advance a social conversation about the value of diversity in education, sports, research, or any other field. More importantly, bringing individuals to a higher education setting is critical to the mission of creating access and opportunity for those individuals who may not have the support to advance beyond high school. Seeing themselves on a college or university campus as a part of a conference or event enables them to better see themselves attending a college or university and attaining a post-secondary degree.



Supporting the Academic Mission

Every institution of higher learning has areas of specialty or fledgling academic programs. A robust conference and events department can help elevate the exposure and prestige of your academy through the collaborative development of conferences, seminars, and workshops designed to highlight your academic expertise. For instance, a professor or researcher in an academic department may have impactful learning to share or an important social conversation to advance with colleagues and contemporaries throughout the region, state/province, nation, or world but the task of putting together a structured event to showcase the information is daunting. A conference and events department specializes in event planning, outreach, and

program logistics. Through a partnership with academics, the conference and events department can carry the load of marketing, registration, lodging on or off campus, dining and catering, meeting room logistics, technology needs, and more. This gives faculty members and subject matter experts the ability to focus on content, speakers, and other programmatic areas. Together, academics with the assistance of conferences and events can elevate the profile of any campus.



Community Support and Economic Impact

A strong program with a growth agenda is not something to be ashamed of in your community. While institutions must be respectful of competition issues with local businesses, the reality is that many of the conferences and events that choose to meet at colleges and universities look exclusively for campuses for their gatherings. Hotels and convention centers are not on their radar, and not part of their bid selection process. If they do not select your campus, they will select a different one. Many conference and events programs across the industry partner with their local tourism boards, chambers of commerce, and economic development agencies to attract and retain significant pieces of business each year. Each time your institution hosts one of these groups, it creates an economic impact that is felt throughout your community with each dollar that is spent on travel to and from the event, car, van, and bus rentals, bed nights at hotels, meals at restaurants and with local caterers, admittance to local historical, cultural, and social venues, and a wide variety of entertainment options. By tracking your external conference and events business you can demonstrate, without question, that you offer a unique product in your market that is complementary to the overall health of the community that you serve.



Support Services for the Campus Community

By having a skilled team of event managers, the entire campus community, from student groups to campus departments, can be sure that their meetings and events are executed in a timely, professional, and efficient manner. Utilizing a centralized department focused on meeting and event planning and execution, you can eliminate redundancy in other departments and allow staff and students to focus on things like event content and grassroots marketing. You can also make certain that the non-academic use of facilities is centralized and coordinated with clear communication to service providers across campus. Conferences and events are all about logistics and the conference and events professionals can be your designated campus service center.



Alumni Relations

Often, Alumni Relations is looking for unique ways to engage their valued members. Through various innovative program offerings, partnerships, and exclusive services and offers, your conference and events team can be instrumental in bringing Alumni back to campus for professional and social reasons, all with a sense of affiliation and pride. Through partnerships with enrollment management, marketing & communications, development, athletics, corporate relations, career services, and academic units, conference and event services can act as a bridge to connecting key campus stakeholders together and creating a greater sense of affinity with your institution.



In summary, engagement is the key to growing a strong community, and conferences and events create and facilitate engagement every day. By placing a priority on these activities and setting strategic goals, Unique Venues believes that conferences and events can not only help your campus navigate through these difficult times, it can position you to thrive on the other side.

The team at Unique Venues is glad to answer any questions you may have about the future of conferences and events on campus. We also invite you to watch any of our past webinars or register for free for some of our scheduled sessions through July.

Email campuses@uniquevenues.com to chat with a collegiate conference expert and visit www.uniquevenues.com/resources to view previously recorded webinars or register for upcoming programs.