

# Undergraduate Student Organizations: Creating and Sustaining Community

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# Why student organizations?

- Our goal: increasing diversity in the economics major
- One challenge: feelings of isolation and disconnectedness when you look around the room and don't see (m)any others who “look like you”
- One solution: student organizations!
  - Promote community
  - Especially helpful for students who are in a distinct minority in the department
- Keep in mind: this is going to take time and effort on your part
  - Especially (but not only) at the beginning

# Student Testimony 1

- Participating in UWEB introduced me to the possibility of having the job title "professor." If not for UWEB, I wouldn't have considered applying to the Fulbright program as well as Masters and PhD programs after graduating. UWEB showed me that I had faculty support and that professors cared about me beyond the classroom. It taught me that academia can be a career and there are applications to what we learn in the classroom outside of the classroom.
- I vividly remember Prof. Olney talking about many students that she had and their careers after graduating. Hearing their stories enabled me to imagine a career in so many different fields.
  - Daniella Wegner, Class of 2018, UWEB

# Student Testimony 2

- UWEB gave me the opportunity to connect with a lot of other women pursuing economics. I've made lifelong friends, found mentors who are other women in academia (I'm starting a PhD program in Fall '23), and had a supportive community of women that I don't think I'd have found otherwise.
- Also UWEB introduced me to the type of research that I want to do myself. Alice Wu's EJMR paper specifically has been a \*huge\* inspiration for my current interests. The UWEB community was super helpful in learning about what it means to get an Econ PhD, how to do that, etc.
- I'm currently finishing up a predoc position at UChicago where I've been working on a paper on gendered effects of the editorial process ("[Editing a Woman's Voice](#)" pre-print on arxiv). Especially after speaking with other predocs, young PhDs, and "Editing a Woman's Voice", I realize that UWEB created a really unique and safe space. Honestly, I miss the community more now that I've gotten further along the PhD track and don't have an equivalent at the moment. I am one of the very few RAs in my cohort who has a woman PI and there are not many female RAs in general. Something UWEB definitely provided was a kind space to talk about potentially toxic/difficult moments (certain comments/questions in seminars, negative view of some subfields, rooms full of only men, econtwitter, etc) that one is bound to experience in the field.

- Ekaterina Federova, Class of 2021, UWEB

# Student Testimony 3

- The Students of Color in Economics (currently Underrepresented Minorities in Economics) was the first space where I felt comfortable being an economics major at UC Berkeley. I built a community and was able to thrive with other economics majors who had similar experiences and backgrounds. Together we uncovered essential pieces of the hidden curriculum which enabled us to take concrete steps toward pursuing research opportunities and graduate degrees in economics.
- I am currently finishing up my third year at FRB-Boston and applying to Econ PhD programs
  - Nishan Jones, Class of 2020

# First step, Gathering Together

- This is likely not an “if I build it, they will come” sort of activity
- Talk to a few students you know well. Do they think a club would be a good thing?
- Create opportunities for people to come together, get to know each other
  - A 1-unit reading group associated with the Intro course
  - A series of evening speakers
- Find some \$\$ so you can provide food (pizza suffices)
  - Give them 15 minutes to eat and chat before the activity begins
- ALWAYS have name tags. ALWAYS.
  - Name tents that can be read from afar.
  - And name tags that you write their name on (buy a sharpie too)

# Help them bond.

- What helps people bond?
  - Knowing each other's names (ALWAYS have nametags)
  - Finding something in common (do ice breaker activities that elicit this info)
  - Sharing conversation over something they both care about
    - If the events you're hosting are all passive, that won't do it
    - Book groups work
    - Talk back / roundtable conversation with speaker works
    - Key: everyone has a chance to talk, without having to face down fear
  - Laughter
  - Seeing the same person a second time, and using their name (nametags, ALWAYS)
  - Do not force any sort of personal/emotional revelations, ever

# Turn that bond into enthusiasm for more

- I wouldn't start the term with "Do y'all want to form a club?"
- I would end there, once they have formed bonds and want to stay connected
- Toward the end of the term, the work starts
  - Do you want to form a club?
  - Who wants to be involved in forming it? (get names and contact info)
  - Does anyone have experience with the campus system for establishing a student org?
  - When should we meet (offer your office) and when (set a date, or [when2meet.com](https://when2meet.com))?

# Becoming a Registered Student Organization

- Your campus will have some sort of system and language
- One or more of the students will know what to do; harness that energy/knowledge
- Probably they will need
  - Initial set of officers
  - A constitution
  - Some set of documents provided by the Associated Students or Dean of Students
- Your job is to encourage, prod, and sign what needs to be signed
  - Don't do the work for them!
  - You're now more of a choreographer, not an on-stage dancer
  - And soon, they may even take over the choreography

# Money helps.

- Help them find money.
  - T-shirts! Stickers! Water bottles! (swag swag swag)
  - And of course, pizza
  - And . . . Nametags!
- There may be funds for RSOs through Associated Students or Dean of Students
- But supplement this with department funds
  - Cajole your chair
  - Get it in writing so the next chair is bound to continue it
  - And get an annual commitment of \$\$ for the student org

# And now your job is (not quite) done

- Once they've got it up and running, you switch to the faculty advisor role
- Some years, there are strong leaders, and your role is minimal
- Other years – like after covid destroyed most student orgs – your role is greater
  - Be sure they have a leadership system in place in which seniors train juniors/sophs
    - This is what fell apart with the covid shutdowns
- And then you get to sit back, take it all in, smile, and know you've made a difference in someone's life