and Couples-to-Be

Programming For Couples:

Dating Activities:

Programming To
Communication—
The Place to Begin

It is best to start with programs that educate students on the purpose of dating—getting to know someone special—and the variety of ways to meet people and sustain relationships. For good relationships to grow, there must be a good mental connection between the parties involved. Here are some programs that allow students the opportunity to effectively communicate with each other.

● Networking Socials

These are events in which students are able to communicate with each other without having the distractions of a dance floor or alcohol involved. These events should take place in a relaxing, well-lit environment where students can feel at ease. A student lounge is ideal. Activities can include a name tag contest, an information treasure hunt, and/or a speed date activity. Giveaways can include prizes such as movie passes, free restaurant dinners, gift certificates or tickets to other scheduled campus events.

● Rap Sessions/Cyphers

Many students experience unnecessary stress about dating because they don’t know some of the basics involved in going out with and getting to know a person who might interest them. However, dating is like many other goal-oriented activities in that it requires some knowledge and education. Group discussions are very effective in helping students learn about dating in an organized way.

In hip-hop culture, rap sessions are called cyphers. These activities are good to schedule at the end of an evening, especially after a guest speaker has made a presentation on a pertinent topic. Rap sessions or cyphers might be more entertaining and effective if the speaker or another authority on relationships is invited to participate. These sessions can be coordinated anywhere on campus, whether it’s in the student union, the cafeteria or a residence hall lounge.

In such public forums, wholesome values can be promoted and inappropriate behavior can be confronted. These sessions allow students to debate and examine their behavior while gaining an understanding of other points of view.

Rap sessions should feature a theme and should be strategically scheduled before or after large social events, such as plays or films with relationship themes. Juice and other beverages can be provided, along with easy-to-eat finger foods. The events should offer an inviting, inclusive vibe that will attract a cross-section of the student population.

Rap sessions should be coordinated by a committee of students responsible for determining session leaders and topics. Topics for future sessions can be gathered from current session participants. The committee should also provide resource information on handouts.

● Dating Games

Dating games can offer an organized way for students to meet each other. One such game requires nine students, an area with a stage (or stage set-up), a curtain partition, two big and four small prizes, and an audience. As in the TV show The Dating Game, one student sits on one side of a partition and asks questions of three other students on the other side of the partition. The student who will be choosing from among the other three contestants should have at least five questions to ask and the questions should be approved in advance by the planning committee.

There should be two rounds—one round should feature a male student choosing from three female students and the other should feature a female student choosing from three male students. (However, this game can be easily adapted to fit the needs of

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**Dating Activities Help Students:**

- Learn interpersonal skills;
- Share physical activities such as biking and bowling; and
- Enjoy expressive outlets.

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same-sex couples.) The ninth student, who will serve as the host, should be very charismatic and outgoing to help keep the event fun for everyone. (Check the theater department for candidates.)

All participants should receive a small gift, such as a book on relationships or a T-shirt. The two winning couples should be given a larger gift, such as dinner at an upscale restaurant. (Transportation might also be included.)

● Singles Contests
Singles contests are very easy and effective to produce. They can be attached to other programs or offered as single events. Begin with the host asking for a volunteer from the audience. The first volunteer is asked questions by the audience. Then the host asks for three more volunteers, the opposite sex stand at their seats (this program can also be offered with same-sex couples in mind). Then the three volunteers are asked questions from the audience. The audience is then asked to choose which of the three volunteers should win a date with the first volunteer. The students are then awarded prize for their participation.

This type of program helps students make a connection at a place they both decided to attend. Common interests are a necessary ingredient for healthy relationships and people who attend the same types of events may have similar interests.

● Matchmaking Activities
Matchmaking activities are good for connecting a number of students with compatible qualities. There are many ways to coordinate matchmaking activities. I suggest developing a survey to attract interested students. These surveys should ask students a variety of questions about their interests, ranging from favorite movies, musical tastes and hobbies. Survey results should be coded so names are not known. The forms should then be paired according to similar interests. Then the couples are invited to an event during which they are able to meet their match.
Suggested Dating Activities

- Networking Socials
- Rap Sessions/Cyphers
- Singles Contests
- Matchmaking Activities
- Couples Activities
- Physical Activities (Biking, Bowling, etc.)
- Expressive Outlets (Open Mic Nights, etc.)

Couples Activities

After couples have already established the beginnings of relationships, programming can be brought to the next level. Consider activities in which couples can participate as a unit, such as The Nearly Wed Game, which is based on the well-known TV game show The Newlywed Game. Couples are awarded prizes based on how much they know about each other.

This is a great way to encourage students to focus on and develop the non-physical aspects of their relationships.

Physical Activities

Certain physical activities can serve as an alternative to some of the activities mentioned above. Consider activities that men and women can perform equally and don’t require much practiced skill, such as bike riding, dance seminars and bowling. These kinds of events are similar in effect to going out to a club or attending a party. However, they are more appropriate entertainment alternatives because they don’t involve alcohol and dim lights. Students are better able to pursue the healthy aspects of physical attraction without the influence of those factors.

Expressive Outlets

Some programming options allow students to express their feelings, political views and personal issues. A good choice might be an open mic night mixing poetry, comedy, rapping and singing, along with theatrical presentations in a lounge environment. An open mic program allows free expression without undue social pressure. Such a program can also be interactive by allowing the audience the opportunity to ask questions of the performer or by holding a reception afterwards, during which an informal dialogue can take place.

Refreshments and light snacks should be made available as an incentive for students to attend. Whether students take part in the show or the after-show reception, open mic discussions allow them the opportunity to express themselves on subjects about which they feel passionate, which is a skill needed not only in dating, but in life in general.
Dating Activities

Open mics should have themes that focus on everything from politics and religion to personal motivation and developing life goals.

A Positive Experience for Everyone

These are the kinds of programs that helped to improve the quality of dating for students on my college campus. I hope they are still relevant for yours.

The college experience is a very influential period in students’ lives. It is during these years they learn all manner of social behaviors. Dating is a learned behavior and people learn from what they see and experience. Try a few of the programs suggested here and help make dating a positive experience for everyone on your campus.

Jeff Carroll is owner of Red, Black and Green Promotions (FL) and has been a college entertainment agent for 15 years. In NACA, he has served two terms on the Associate Member Advisory Council. He is the author of a forthcoming book, Hatin’ the GAME, and was executive producer and screenwriter for the film Holla If I Kill You. In addition, he is a staff writer for Urban America Newspaper in Miami, FL. He holds a bachelor's degree in management science, with collateral work in African studies. In the community, he served as an NAACP youth advisor for 10 years.