

Guidelines and Expectations for Graduation Pledge Alliance Chapters

Introduction

The Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility, started in 1987 at Humboldt State University, has since spread to many colleges, universities, and other schools around the world, under the guidance and coordination of the Graduation Pledge Alliance (GPA). The mission of GPA is to build a global community of responsible graduates improving society and the environment through the workplace. GPA's vision is a world where every graduate, through the workplace, is an effective leader for social and environmental improvement. This document gives guidelines and expectations for GPA chapters so that the Pledge movement may continue to prosper, for the sake of promoting quality programs, and to develop continuity within the movement. GPA chapters are expected to fulfill the items in the "Chapter Expectations" section of this document. While not strictly expected of GPA chapters, GPA chapters are highly encouraged over time to work toward implementing what is in the "Chapter Guidelines" section of the document.

Why the Pledge?

On average, the lives of current students will extend for many decades after their graduations. It is imperative, given the challenges facing the next generation, that fundamental shifts in societal values must occur. The Graduation Pledge is a promise to consider the consequences of our workplace decisions and how we may begin to create a sustainable society, through our work, for generations to come. As forbearers of the future, students are in an ideal position to consciously make individual contributions and, collectively, can make all the difference in the world.

Respect for Individuals

The GPA is a nonpartisan and nonsectarian organization that recognizes and supports individual values and beliefs. Each campus program is considered to be autonomous, albeit *within the framework of the movement*. Groups that organize and facilitate the Graduation Pledge should not officially support or condemn any one cause over another. Furthermore, Graduation Pledge organizers should make sincere efforts to approach and involve individuals and groups of people from across a wide spectrum of values and beliefs concerning the meanings of social and environmental responsibility.

Pledge Content

While the GPA does have a standard *Pledge statement*, schools are free to alter this statement as they see fit, so long as the essential values of social and environmental responsibility in the workplace are included. Pledge: ***I _____ pledge to explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organizations for which I work.***

Chapter Expectations

There are two minimal expectations that a GPA chapter must meet in order to be considered an active chapter and be listed on the Graduation Pledge Alliance website:

- By August 1st: Fill out the "GPA Pledger Information Template" (<http://www.graduationpledge.org/materials-and-resources.php>) with the information of Pledgers every graduation season and submit to the GPA Executive Director by email
- By August 1st: After every graduation season, fill out the end-of-year survey administered by the GPA Executive Director

To receive the latest updates on the Pledger Information Template and the end-of-year survey, chapter leaders should communicate with the GPA Executive Director to ensure that they are on the GPA email list.

Chapter Guidelines

Campus Integration

Effective Graduation Pledge programs will engage students and inspire them throughout their educational experience, to be aware of how our individual and collective actions impact society. Effective Graduation Pledge programs will also actively demonstrate social and environmental responsibility in the very conduct of their campus program.

Graduation Pledge organizers should make every effort to get the Pledge institutionalized at their school by integrating with the campus community through programs such as campus orientation programs, first-year experience classes, class presentations, school advertising literature, brochures, web-pages, commencement exercises, and materials/presentations made by the alumni and career service offices. This type of integration will allow students to fully understand, consider, and take the Pledge with integrity and commitment in mind, and will help ensure the continuation of the Pledge program at the school. Bentley College (currently the location of GPA headquarters) serves as one example of how the Graduation Pledge fits within a wider context and academic school program that encompasses various ethical and social responsibility components (<http://www.bentley.edu/alliance/>).

Program Development

Campus Pledge organizers can rely on the support of the GPA for individualized support of the campus program. Organizers should consider the following suggestions when launching a Pledge program:

- Seek campus sponsors that will be committed to the long-term viability of the program, and can provide institutional support.
- Utilize the support of the GPA, Regional Centers and other Pledge campuses for expertise, suggestions and technical assistance.
- Provide information sessions and campus-awareness programs to introduce the Pledge and reinforce how it guides students in making responsible decisions.
- Develop planning and assessment tools to determine the effectiveness of the program.

Program Design

Although Pledge efforts may be most noticeable around the time of graduation, organizers are encouraged to establish a year-round program to deepen awareness of the Pledge on campus and, whenever possible, in the surrounding community. Such programs can include curricular and extracurricular activities, special events, presentations, guest speakers, recognition of distinguished alumni, newspaper articles, and press releases. Seeking broader attention, particularly through the media, greatly increases the visibility of the Pledge and brings our message of environmental and social responsibility to the greater community. Thus, students are encouraged to make their Pledge commitment public. Graduating students are encouraged to show their support by wearing a green pledge ribbon, pin, or button. (Occasionally a different colored ribbon has been used for various reasons.) In addition, providing the opportunity for students to accept and sign a Pledge card will provide an ongoing personal reminder of their graduation promise.

Walking the Talk

It is imperative that each campus Pledge group consider whether they are making socially and environmentally responsible decisions in all aspects of their conduct while organizing the Graduation Pledge program.

Staying Connected

Pledge campuses should stay in contact with the Graduation Pledge Alliance headquarters and, where available and feasible, their regional center, to keep others informed and also to gain information. Direct communication and cooperation with other schools' Pledge programs is also encouraged. Periodic email updates will be sent to campuses, providing the latest information, news from other campus programs, ideas on how to expand or improve programs, and ways that we may be able to work together. Thus, chapter leaders should ensure that they are on the GPA email list. The Graduation Pledge will continue to expand if organizers discuss the Pledge project with other schools through their personal and organizational connections.

After Graduation

Where possible, Pledge organizers should make an effort to offer and provide information, support and community to Pledge signers after they have graduated, to help them effectively live out their promises. At a minimum though, this information and support should be provided to seniors before they graduate. Additionally, in order to better demonstrate the positive effects of the Pledge, organizers should consider ways of soliciting from graduated Pledge signers their personal stories of Pledge-motivated job and career choices. Also, consider setting up a list-serve of Pledge signers over the years in order to stay connected. This could be done through an alumni office, or leaders can come up with other means that are best suited for their needs.