



Guidelines, Expectations, and Tips 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 program was housed at Manchester University (Indiana) during the late 1990s and early 2000s, before moving to Bentley University in 2007. This document gives guidelines and expectations for GPA chapters so that the Pledge movement may continue to prosper, especially in terms of promoting quality programs and developing continuity within the movement.

In order to be counted as an *active* chapter, all GPA programs are expected to fulfill the items in the “Chapter Expectations” section of this document. Although not strictly expected of GPA chapters, GPA chapters are *highly* encouraged over time to work toward implementing the full spirit of this document.

Why the Pledge?

Given the challenges facing the current generation of college students – the next generation of societal leaders – it is becoming increasingly clear 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 might work toward creating 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, make significant 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

Although 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.

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.

As an example, the Pledge at Bentley University reflects the institution's role as a business school:

I _____ pledge to continue my role as a civic leader by carrying on the Bentley tradition of ethics, service, sustainability and social responsibility as an active member of the organizations in which I work and the communities in which I live.

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.

Each year, no later than August 1st:

- Complete and submit the “GPA Pledger Information Template” to the GPA Executive Director via an e-mail attachment. This report should contain information about Pledgers (Pledge signers who have graduated) who have graduated that year. See <http://www.graduationpledge.org/pledge-organizers/materials-and-resources/>.
- Complete and submit the end-of-year survey administered by the GPA Executive Director.

New chapters gain the *active* classification following their first graduation pledging as long as the above expectations are met. Ongoing chapters renew their “active” status every year by completing and submitting these two reports. 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.

Starting a Pledge Chapter – Three Keys to Success

Have a successful first year

When starting a new Pledge chapter, there is nothing more rewarding than having a successful launch. Chapter leaders must judge how much time and effort they want to invest and develop a list of goals and tasks that they can realistically accomplish in that time. Among the key tasks involved are:

- Developing publicity for the Pledge (e.g., flyers, e-mail messages, school newspaper articles) as a way of generating interest
- Seeking support from clubs, organizations and class officers (perhaps to help cover cost of materials, volunteer time at a Pledge signing event)
- Seeking administrative and faculty support (e.g., getting the Pledge mentioned at the commencement ceremony)
- Making Pledge ribbons and cards and creating a process/ceremony for graduating students to sign the Pledge (e.g., cap and gown distribution, commencement rehearsal, baccalaureate ceremony)
- Recruiting new leadership to lead the Pledge chapter and its Pledge program the following year (e.g., interested students of other class years, a campus club, or next year's class officers).

Get some help!

While one person certainly can bring the Pledge to a school alone, it is much easier (and often more successful) to recruit help. Find some friends who share a common interest, or find a club that would be interested. Faculty members might know students who would be interested in helping. Anyone who is interested will be of great help. First, it always helps to divide up the workload. Second, collaborators can brainstorm which methods will be most effective for their campus. Third, collaborators can hold each other accountable. Fourth, and most importantly, it's usually more fun to work with others.

Make the Pledge sustainable

It is critical to anchor the Pledge chapter at the school. Having the first year be successful is very rewarding, but knowing that the Pledge chapter is still successful years after the founding leadership

graduates is even more rewarding. Find the students of other class years, class officers, a campus club, a faculty member, or an administrator who will carry the Pledge into the next several years.

Campus Integration

Effective Graduation Pledge programs 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.

Pledge chapter leaders 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 University (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 focused on campus involvement, civic engagement, and ethical and socially responsible behavior (see <http://www.bentley.edu/alliance/bclp>).

Program Development

Pledge chapter leaders can rely on the support of the GPA for individualized support of the campus chapter. Leaders should consider the following suggestions when launching a Pledge chapter:

- Seek campus sponsors that will be committed to the long-term viability of the chapter and can provide institutional support.
- Utilize the support of the GPA 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 in the workplace.
- Develop planning and assessment tools to determine the effectiveness of the chapter.

Program Design

Although Pledge efforts may be most noticeable around the time of graduation, chapter leaders 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 workplace environmental and social responsibility to the greater community. Thus, students are encouraged to make their Pledge commitment public by wearing a green Pledge ribbon, pin, or button at commencement. 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 campus Pledge chapters 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 chapter leaders should stay in contact with the Graduation Pledge Alliance headquarters to keep others informed and also to gain information. Direct communication and cooperation with other schools' Pledge chapters is also encouraged. Periodic email updates will be sent to chapters, providing the latest information, news from other chapters, 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 by contacting the GPA Executive Director. The Graduation Pledge will continue to expand if chapter leaders discuss the Graduation Pledge with other schools through their personal and organizational connections.

After Graduation

Where possible, chapter leaders should make an effort to offer and provide information, support and community to Pledgers to help them effectively live out their promises. At a minimum though, this information and support should be provided to students before they graduate. Additionally, in order to better demonstrate the positive effects of the Pledge, chapter leaders should consider ways of soliciting from Pledgers their personal stories of Pledge-motivated job and career choices. Also, consider setting up a list-serve of Pledgers 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.

Summary of Suggested Practices and Tips

Start Your Campaign Early

It's never too early to start a campaign. Create a list of tasks that can be completed ahead of time to alleviate pressure when graduation time comes near and academic pressures increase.

Distribute Pledge Cards and Ribbons

Print Graduation Pledge cards (found at <http://www.graduationpledge.org/pledge-organizers/materials-and-resources/>) to pass out to students who have signed the Pledge and give green ribbons to wear on the graduation robe. Both items should be distributed when students sign the Pledge.

Spread the Word on the Pledge

Students who hear about the Pledge prior to signing it are more likely to sign when the time comes. Advertise the Pledge by hanging flyers around campus, creating a campaign website, adding the Pledge to campus announcements, and having an information table at a campus or student center. Utilize as many resources as possible.

Establish a Time and Location for Students to Sign the Pledge

Pick a time and location for students to sign the Pledge and advertise it well. Suggested times to have students sign are during commencement rehearsal, cap and gown pick up, graduating class events, and tables in high traffic areas.

Incorporate the Pledge into Commencement

Contact administrators who are organizing commencement and see if the Pledge can be incorporated into the ceremony. The Pledge can be incorporated via a mention in the commencement booklet or during a speech.