



Chapter Best Practices: Invitation & Induction Ideas

How to create better student experiences with the invitation and the induction ceremony.

A college of just 700 students, the Kansas Wesleyan chapter faces the same predicament as many smaller schools do: to maintain a viable Alpha Chi chapter, they could ill afford to let any eligible students slip through their recruitment net. On average, the chapter invited just 20 new students each year. Dr. Steve Hoekstra, the Kansas Delta chapter sponsor, studied the chapter's recruitment efforts and pinpointed two crucial moments in the chapter's outreach: the invitation and the induction ceremony.

What's the best way to invite students to join Alpha Chi?

Like many chapter sponsors, Dr. Hoekstra realized the traditional means of inviting eligible juniors into Alpha Chi no longer worked on his campus. "Sending out an email is the quickest way for the invitation to be overlooked, lost or simply ignored," says Hoekstra. At Kansas Wesleyan, an email from the national office gets a 53 percent yield. A letter sent via campus mail delivered equally poor results.

So, Dr. Hoekstra experimented. Here is what worked for the Kansas Delta Chapter.

1. Add a Personal Touch

"Students at a small school expect a personal touch," says Hoekstra. "That's why they came to a school our size." At Kansas Wesleyan, the invitations go out signed by the student chapter president. "We're a small campus," he says. "People really do know each other." The personal touch from a respected peer makes the invitees "feel like Alpha Chi is legit, not just a scam asking for money." Personalized invitations add meaning and delivering the letter by current AX member just makes it more inviting. After all, if your friends are members, you should be too.

2. Make it a Spectacle

Dr. Hoekstra has tried several versions of a public invitation. In each, he interrupted class (with the professor's prior approval) to publicly recognize and invite a new recruit. In one version, he had the invitee's advisor deliver the invitation. In another, he dispatched several AX members to a classroom with balloons and party hats and an invitation. And finally, he dispatched a team of AX members along with the school mascot (who may or may not have been an AX member — it's a secret). These personalized letter deliveries drove a 92 to 96 percent yield. "Basically, we gave the letter a bit of pageantry," says Hoekstra.

3. Hand Out Swag

Chapters give out pins at induction. Why not swag along with the invitation? Anything that says Alpha Chi on it will keep Alpha Chi on top of mind. Branded pens and wristbands make for inexpensive giveaways. "The students find it fun," says Hoekstra. "In fact, when we pass them out, the students always shout out, 'I want one!'"

4. Raise Visibility on Campus

Worst case scenario: your invitation to join is the first time an eligible student hears about AX. To increase chapter visibility:

- Host info sessions for invitees prior to acceptance.
- Create feeder streams with honors colleges for freshman and sophomores.
- Co-sponsor service projects to get your name out there (and on the sponsorship posters).
- Set up event booths next to other honors society and honors school booths.

How to make the Induction Ceremony into a More Meaningful Experience

If the key to the invitation process ceremony is more personalization, the key to the induction ceremony is more formality. At Kansas Wesleyan, Dr. Hoekstra has transformed his induction into a truly special ritual full of plenty of pomp and circumstance. "We want our induction to be serious," he says. "We want it to say, 'You are the intellectual leaders on campus and with that comes a responsibility to promote academic rigor, honor and scholarship. You're joining an elite group.'" The idea is to make the students feel flattered and to recognize them for their hard work.

How can you create a heightened induction ceremony experience for your chapter?

1. Harry Potterize the Ceremony

Incorporate as much ritual and formality into your induction ceremony. Faculty should wear full academic regalia. Students should dress up. Block off reserved seating for guests. Light the candles. Add music. At Kansas Wesleyan, they've included a string quartet to play a prelude, processional, and recessional during the ceremony. They also sing the AX hymn. The space should be tricked out with decorations (do your best Hogwarts impersonation). Use the supplied AX national chapter ceremony guides and talking points. They are designed to give heft and weight to the ceremony.

2. Invite Faculty and AX Alumni

For the induction, persuade as many faculty to attend as possible. And include them in the ceremony. Instead of handing the pin to the students, have their faculty advisor pin them when they come off the stage. By giving them a role, faculty feel good about attending.

3. Find a Goldilocks Venue

At Kansas Wesleyan, the chapter moved the induction ceremony around campus after losing access to a small, cozy chapel. They relocated to a large auditorium, but it felt too open and looked vacant. "You don't want 400 empty seats" says Hoekstra. Finally, they booked a small theater auditorium, and it felt just right. "You want you to have room for all the attendees, to decorate the space, and for everything to have to be formal in a nice cozy space." A rule of thumb, says Hoekstra, is to have no more than 50% of the seats unfilled.

4. Schedule Induction on Parents or Alumni Weekend

When parents are on campus, you can make an induction a more meaningful event. Syncing your ceremony with Parents Weekend or Alumni Weekend is a good tactic to increase attendance.

Shout Out!

This case study was created by the Kansas Delta chapter at Kansas Wesleyan. Their story was originally presented to the Alpha Chi National Conference in Louisville, KY.