



ECSU Student Center and Student Activities Office *Co-curricular education for student organizational leadership*

ICEBREAKERS

Icebreakers work! Everybody hates them. We groan in agony whenever someone asks us to participate in one. Then why bother with icebreakers at all? They are embarrassing and we always have to do dumb things like balance eggs on spoons or tell everyone the exciting thing we did over the summer. No thank you. We would rather go about our work and not be bothered by such foolishness. But they work! Ask anyone who has ever worked with a group of people, and they will tell you how invaluable icebreakers can be.

ICEBREAKER USES

Icebreakers can be used in almost any setting at any time. The trick is matching your purpose and activity to your audience. First, decide what you hope to accomplish by using icebreakers:

- ◆ Introduce group members to one another
- ◆ Help group members learn something about each other
- ◆ Build trust and a sense of community within the group

Depending on the type of group you are working with, you may only need to introduce them to each other. If your purpose is to work with them more intensely, realize that you must begin with introductions and work from there. Committees and staffs that must work together as a team, benefit greatly from strategies which explore trust and togetherness. Again, how much time you spend on each level of activity will depend on how well the group already knows itself and well they work as a team.

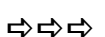
RESOURCES

There are literally thousands of resources available containing specific games and icebreakers. The Student Activities Office staff is more than willing to help you plan your games. Public libraries are a good source of games. The key is choosing games that suit your purpose. Putting a group through the motions of an exercise with no purpose or relation to anything they are doing will only alienate them. When your purpose, audience, and activity complement one another, you have a winning combination.

Following are just a couple of Icebreaker examples you can use.

NAME FAMILIARITY

This exercise works best with approximately fifteen participants. If your group is larger, break it down into smaller groups or find a room that will accommodate your large group. A gymnasium or an outdoor field work best. For each group, you will need at least five items for tossing. Tennis balls work well, but soft yarn balls cause less injury and damage. Form a circle. Take a few minutes for each member of the group to state their name. Repeat the names if needed. Start with one ball. Call out someone's name in the group and throw them the ball. They then call out another name and throw the ball to that person. The ball continues to travel around the circle in this manner. After the participants are somewhat comfortable with the names, throw in another ball. Keep adding balls periodically to add to the confusion. The activity ends whenever the group comfortably knows everyone's name.



BOP

Bop is a game used primarily to loosen up a quiet group who does not know its members very well. It is a lot of fun and its participants tend to get a little noisy. Again, fifteen is a good number to work with; anything larger leaves some players standing around. One person stands in the middle of the circle. He/she looks at a person and either says "bop" or "boppity bop." If he/she says "bop," the person looked at does nothing. If he/she says "boppity bop," the person must say "bop" before the person in the middle finishes saying "boppity bop." As soon as someone in the circle makes a mistake, they become the player in the middle. Once the players catch on to this, other gestures can be added. If the person in the middle says "jello," the person he/she looked at must wiggle like a piece of jello, while the players on either side must put their arms out toward the wiggler to form the bowl before the player in the middle counts to five. If the player in the middle says "road kill," the person looked at must play dead while those on either side drive the car. This must all be done before the person in the middle counts to five. In the same manner, you can use "elephant" where one person extends his/her hands to make the trunk, and those on either side cup their arms around their head to make the ears. Any other gestures created by the group can be used, too.

TURNSTYLE

Turnstyle is an exercise in team building. You will need one long jump rope and two individuals to twirl it. While the rope is being twirled, every member must make it through the jump rope in one jump, without skipping a twirl, and without any mistakes. Have the participants form a line in front of the rope. Once the first player jumps through, someone must jump through for every twirl of the rope. The group must get everyone safely through the rope. They can take time out to discuss strategy if they like.

These are only a few of the hundreds of icebreakers available. And there's always room for more if you feel creative!

REFERENCE

Adapted from: St. Norbert College, Department of Leadership, Service & Involvement

*Additional resource handouts are available as well as consultation services.
For more information, contact the Student Activities Office in the Student Center at 465-4450.*