

# SPIRIT PROGRAM SAFETY AUDIT

1. How many students participate in our spirit program? Please specify by cheer, dance and mascot.

ANSWER: The number of participants in a spirit program is dependent upon the role, demands and requirements of the program by the institution. Larger roles and more demands may often require more participants. This can vary widely by institutions, but normally cheer participants range from 12 to 40; dance participants range from 12-20; mascots range from 1-4. The key is for the coach and administration to determine if the responsibilities are being met while still allowing the participants to enjoy and participate in the "mainstream" of college student life.

2. Are all squad members full time students?

ANSWER: This may also vary by institution and the nature by which the spirit program is governed. Some programs may be under Student Activities, Club Sports, Athletics, the Band, etc. In general, all spirit program participants should be actively and successfully moving toward obtaining a degree within a reasonable amount of time. Consideration should be allowed for graduating seniors and graduate students.

3. What is the average age of our cheerleading squad?

ANSWER: Generally, the average age of a college undergraduate student is approximately 20 years old. If the average age of your spirit program is greater than this, it may indicate a lack of academic commitment by the team members. If the average age is below this, it may indicate difficulty in retaining team members in the program for some reason.

4. The main purpose of our institution's spirit program is to provide leadership in generating school spirit surrounding our inter-collegiate athletic teams. Have the criteria to select our squad been created to achieve this mission?

ANSWER: If the appearance, personality and performance execution of the team members are considered satisfactory by the coach, administration and general audience, then most likely the selection criteria matches the mission. If not, then the criteria and overall philosophy between selection, direction and administration should be further examined.

5. Are our selection criteria and procedures clearly documented and communicated to all those wishing to be members of our spirit program?

ANSWER: All school, department and spirit program policies and procedures (including specific selection criteria and procedures) should be clearly presented in writing to each candidate prior to joining the spirit program. These documents should be signed and dated by each participant, and then returned to the coach or administrator in charge of the program to be filed and maintained for the entire year. This process should be repeated each year during the selection process, and for anyone entering the program during the year.

6. Do we emphasize an effective balance of crowd leading techniques, energy, enthusiasm and athleticism at our athletic events?

ANSWER: The administration should be satisfied with the level of crowd leading ability of the spirit program at games, pep rallies and special events. This would include outgoing and energetic personalities, genuine smiles and enthusiasm, effective body language, use of signs, flags, banners and other props to raise and promote crowd participation and response. Athleticism can effectively be used in conjunction with these elements as well, but if it appears that the athleticism outweighs these other elements un-proportionately, corrective measures should be taken to ensure consistent philosophies exist between the administration and the spirit program.

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7. Do the members of our squad project the image consistent with the expectations of our institution and department?  
ANSWER: Given the high visibility of this activity and the clear reflection it may have on the institution (both positive and negative), the spirit program members should portray the image of elite student body representatives as well as respectable community members. They should be well groomed, appropriately attired, maintain proper conduct and self control, portray good sportsmanship and respect for others at all times. This should be stated in the programs policies and procedures, and there should be specific actions for failure to meet any of these expectations. If these expectations are not being met, then corrective measures should be taken to ensure consistent philosophies exist between the administration and the spirit program.
8. Do we have clear policies and procedures that specify rules of conduct for our coaches and squad members, and have these been clearly communicated to all?  
ANSWER: See #5 above. It is extremely important to have this information in writing, signed by the participants and coaches, and filed for the entire year. The process should be repeated annually.
9. Have all squad members and coaches signed documents acknowledging their understanding of our rules of conduct and agreeing to abide by them?  
ANSWER: See questions 5 & 8 above.
10. Do practice schedules reflect a balance between spirit planning and athletic technique development? On average, how many hours per week does our squad practice?  
ANSWER: Spirit team participation should not exceed 20 hours of activity weekly including practice, conditioning, appearances, pep rallies and games. Actual team practice time should not normally exceed 8 hours per week, with adequate time devoted to spirit planning and crowd response techniques. If the mass majority of every practice is devoted to athleticism, then the overall role and purpose of the programs' mission may be confused. Usually, individual practice sessions that exceed more than 2 hours in length are found to be less productive than those that are shorter and remain focused on their content.
11. Are we allowing our squad members sufficient time to have their academic responsibilities be their primary focus and are we monitoring each squad member's academic progress?  
ANSWER: See #10 above. Additionally, the academic performance of each participant should be monitored and documented at least semi-annually in order to detect declining or unsatisfactory performance. When detected, corrective procedures should be in place in order to assist the student(s) in restoring successful academic achievement, or face possible disciplinary actions.
12. What is the graduation rate of our cheerleading squad?  
ANSWER: This graduation rate for spirit program participants should match or exceed that of the general student population, or that of the department under which they are governed.
13. Do our squad members participate in other student activities so that they are authentic student body members and Campus leaders?  
ANSWER: See #10 above. The participants should have adequate time to enjoy and participate in the "mainstream" of college life and its associated activities. Participation in other clubs, organizations, fraternities/sororities, part-time jobs, etc. is essential in the full development and experience of a college student. Otherwise, there could possibly be an indication of the spirit program consuming too much of their time which should result in further evaluation of the program and its implementation.

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14. Have all of our coaches been sufficiently interviewed to understand their roles in facilitating the successful execution of our spirit program according to its mission as defined by our institution's administration?

ANSWER: It is essential that the athletic and school administration have constant and clear communications with the spirit program coach/administrator to ensure that common goals and objectives are shared, understood and implemented. This should include monthly or quarterly meetings, and at least an annual Evaluation of the program and its performance by the administration based on these shared goals and objectives.

15. Do our coaches understand that they have primary responsibility for the safe supervision of the squad?

ANSWER: Safety should be the first priority for your spirit program. All coaches should be AACCA trained and certified (this is required for squad members to be covered under the NCAA catastrophic insurance policy), and required to follow the AACCA College Safety Rules at all times. All squad activities should be supervised by an AACCA certified coach, and all coaches should understand and accept the responsibility of their team's safety during official program activities (including travel).

16. Is it our program's policy to strictly follow the AACCA safety guidelines? Are our coaches thoroughly familiar with these guidelines, and do they understand their responsibility to strictly follow these guidelines at all times?

ANSWER: See question 15 above.

17. Are our coaches AACCA safety certified?

ANSWER: See question 15 above.

18. Do we use proper stunt progression sequences as defined by AACCA and do we keep a thorough record of each squad member's progress on stunt progressions?

ANSWER: It is an important safety procedure as emphasized by the AACCA College Safety Rules to always use proper progressions for any skills being taught, practiced or perfected. It is also recommended for the coach/administrator to keep thorough records of each individual's skill progressions as well as overall team progressions.

19. Are our squad members aware of the AACCA safety rules and do we have a signed document by each acknowledging their understanding of these rules, as well as their agreement to always comply with them?

ANSWER: In addition to the coach, it is equally important that each and every team member know, understand and follow the AACCA College Safety Rules. This should be a part of their team orientation prior to beginning any team activities, and included in the team/school policies and procedures documents that are signed and returned to the coach/administrator for their records.

20. Do we have an official "Emergency Plan" which is posted in our practice area and which our squad has rehearsed?

ANSWER: In the event of serious injury or illness, it is vital to have an "Emergency Plan" in writing readily available to all coaches and participants. This plan should be reviewed often throughout the year to ensure that everyone understands his/her role in the event of an emergency.

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21. Do we have physical examination reports and physician's releases for all squad members?

ANSWER: All participating members should have written proof of a physical examination that releases each person individually to fully participate in the activities required within the program. Such releases should be required prior to any physical activity being allowed to ensure the safety and well being of each member.

22. Do we have a structured fitness and conditioning program that has been designed or approved by a qualified person?

ANSWER: All spirit programs should have a fitness and conditioning program designed specifically for their team and their individual team members by a qualified person that will better prepare them for safe execution of the activities of the program. Included in the fitness program should be specific diet and exercise training that is conducive to each person's physical characteristics for optimum results as well as to avoid injury or illness by improper training or eating disorders.

23. Do we keep complete and thorough records of any injuries that may occur to squad members, as well as how and when they are deemed fit to participate in all squad activities?

ANSWER: It should be standard procedure for the coach/administrator of the spirit program to fully document and report any significant injury that requires medical treatment. Such injuries should be reported immediately to the proper school personnel.

24. Do we have an effective way to determine when squad members who have been injured are physically ready to rejoin the squad for normal activities?

ANSWER: It should be the responsibility of medical personnel to determine via written documentation any program limitations, or when the participant is cleared for full or limited participation.

25. Have we done background checks on our coaches with acceptable outcomes, and do we have this information on file?

ANSWER: It is highly recommended that the school administration conduct background checks on all individuals that work with the spirit program and its members on a regular basis. This includes coaches, assistant coaches, instructors, trainers, etc., and that the results of those background checks are kept on file at the institution.

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