
Down The Road: Is Something Missing From Your Campus?

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If you are reading this magazine, chances are you are a member of ACM. Does your campus have an ACM Chapter? If it doesn't, why not? Having a chapter on your campus can benefit you, your fellow CS students and your campus' CS program. If your chapter is run well, it will enrich your experience, prepare you for your future careers, and even help you get a job.

Ok you say, "this sounds interesting but how do I do this?" First of all, there is no organization that is built on "I". You are about to embark on a journey that can only be completed with team-work. Your team should follow these six steps to starting up a chapter: assemble team, focus and plan, obtain a charter, plan activities, recruit, and hold meetings.

1. **Assemble team:** Your first step is to assemble a team of like-minded individuals. There is no magic number but you should have at least three people. At about the same time you are assembling your team, you should start looking for a sponsor. Your sponsor should be someone who is a permanent member of the CS department faculty. There are two reasons for this: your chapter will need continuity if it is to last and you need someone who knows how the system works to help cut through red tape or avoid it. Your sponsor should also have enough free time to contribute. If you are thinking small, any sponsor will do. If you really want to make things happen, be selective. Your sponsor can play an important role in your organization.
2. **Focus and Plan:** Have a few informal meetings and start to figure out what your chapter's focus is going to be. Take a good look at your CS program and ask yourselves what could enhance it. Here at Cleveland State University we decided that bringing outside computer professionals to our campus to speak to our chapter, and tours of government and corporate computer facilities, would be beneficial. Start by deciding who is going to do what. If something needs to be done, don't finish a meeting until you figure out who is going to do it. Also never close a meeting without announcing when and where your next meeting will be.
3. **Chartering:** You should contact the Local Activities Department at ACM HQ -- chapters@acm.org. They will send you all necessary forms and give you lots of ideas and encouragement. Check out the ACM Student Chapter Starter Kit on the ACM Student Web Page -- <http://www.acm.org/student/startup.html>. You also need to contact whoever is responsible for recognizing student organizations on your campus. Find out what the procedure for recognition is. You are going to have to write bylaws that will adhere to college regulations and meet ACM requirements. If your university has a sample constitution available, use it as much as possible. This will help greatly in your chartering process.

4. **Plan activities:** You've got the ball rolling, now you have to start planning your activities. This is the fun part. Remember when you decided what your chapter's focus was going to be? This is when you start to plan the activities that are going to support this focus. At CSU we started social networking. We networked through family, friends, faculty, and work and asked if they knew anyone who would like to speak. We became involved with local professional computing organizations. We also contacted our Career Services department for ideas and contacts. The result of our networking is that our contacts are now asking us directly for interns and workers.
5. **Recruit:** Build it and they will come, but put the word out. Talk to your classmates and tell them what your chapter is doing. Ask your professors to give plugs for your organization to their classes or ask if you can speak to their class. Hold a student/faculty social. Just get the word out.
6. **Meetings:** Schedule your general membership meetings on a regular basis. Try to select a time that is convenient for most. If possible, schedule an afternoon meeting and an evening meeting. Advertise the time and location of all your meetings. Try your best to make your meetings informative. No one wants to go to a meeting just for the sake of going to a meeting. At our meetings at CSU, we feature outside speakers and our career services CS career advisor.

Stay focused, enthused, and keep up the momentum. If you follow these basic steps your organization will be well on its way to getting established and being successful. If you have any questions or comments please email me at twaszak@acm.org.