

Tips for Scheduling and Communicating with your Journey Groups

Communicating with the students in your Journey Group is an important element of the experience of facilitating. The best methods for communicating are constantly evolving in today's fast-paced world. We often comment that scheduling your Journey Group meetings is about 80 percent of the work that goes into helping a Journey Group flourish. Below, we offer some tips for scheduling and communication.

Scheduling

- Try to schedule all of your meetings right away at the beginning of the semester.
- Determine a regular timeframe that is open for all members.
- Include varied time slots for evening meetings, e.g. 4-6, 5-7, 6-8, 7-9
- Consider “alternate” times like breakfast or the supper hour. Many groups find Sundays work well for them—again, offer varied timeslots.
- It is necessary to consult your students about their schedules before setting a meeting time.
- At the start of each semester have your students complete a “Class Schedule” form. This will assist you in finding a mutual time that is workable for all your members.
- Include every member of the group when setting up a time for a meeting.
- Reminder: students’ schedules (including evening/weekends) will change at semester break.
- If for some reason your group does not meet when they are scheduled, and you need to reschedule, remember that it may take many more communications to set up meetings on short notice.

Methods of Communication

- If your group members are new, try a personal phone call instead of e-mail.
- E-mail is efficient, but more and more we find that students do not regularly check or respond to e-mails, especially at the beginning of the year if they do not recognize your name in their in-box.
- If you use e-mail as your primary form of communication, alert your students to watch for e-mails from you and tell each other when they receive one.
- Do not be shy about asking for your students’ cell phone numbers (preferred over their residence hall extensions, which are rarely used).
- You might try to set up a “group” on Facebook for your Journey Group members—you can even send reminders for events. We find that many students check Facebook frequently throughout the day, and are more likely to remember meeting times.
- Provide each member with your group’s roster complete with cell phone and email address.

Frequency of Communication

- Once your group sets their meetings for the semester, send a complete list of the meeting dates to every member of the group.
- It may be helpful to send reminders about a week before and again the day before the meeting.
- Checking in and/or asking for confirmation e-mails from your group members about a week before the meeting can also be helpful to get a sense of expected attendance.
- Follow up with students who missed your meeting.

Values Expressed through Communication

- *“You are important.”* –urging your group to not meet unless every member is able to attend (at least when you set up the time) sends a message that each person is important to the process.
- *“You were missed.”* –if you find that a member misses a meeting for any reason, especially if she did not inform you ahead of time, follow-up to her them know she was missed.
- *“Commitment is important.”* –if you find your group members are unable to find a common time, even after many attempts to find one, you might consider asking the students as a group to come up with the time. Placing more responsibility on them encourages them to consider their commitment.
- *“Accountability is important.”* –if you find one or two students are not attending meetings and not communicating about their absences, check-in and ask what is preventing them from being able to.