

Mortar Board Chapter Operations

Serving your alma mater ©



Mortar Board's ideals of scholarship, leadership and service are equally important. Embodying all three is what makes a Mortar Board – and a Mortar Board chapter. When it comes to service, it's important to understand how Mortar Boards are expected to serve their alma mater. So how do you make that happen?

What does it mean to serve your alma mater?

- Giving back to your college or university community is an important thing your chapter can do. A chapter is a guest on the college or university's campus. In some cases, the chapter was invited to come to campus many years ago. Sometimes chapters are more recently established. In any event, the college or university asked Mortar Board to come campus, and Mortar Board assured the institution that its chapter would add to the quality of life on campus. Serving your alma mater means your chapter honors that promise and is an integral part of the university's fabric. Mortar Board chapters nationwide are distinctive as the "go-to" group for university administrators. That's why you often hear the phrase, "If you want something done, give it to a Mortar Board."
- Serving your alma mater is different from community service. While community service is an important aspect of what chapters may do, it should not divert the chapter from service to the university community, which must take precedence. This is how Mortar Board remains distinctive. This means engaging in meaningful events on campus and becoming a part of the university's make-up. Mortar Board is not like every other student organization and has no desire to compete with the other student groups to which its members may belong. A Mortar Board chapter's projects should rise above the others and distinctively and meaningfully add to campus life.
- Examples of programs or projects that serve the alma mater are easiest to think of in terms of Mortar Board's ideals, scholarship, leadership or service. Promotion of the advancement of women is a key part of Mortar Board's reason for being as well.
 - A special brunch, breakfast, or dessert for outstanding freshman scholars (or sophomores) and their families showcases Mortar Board to younger students and helps promote scholarship. Work with your institution to capitalize on an event that might already be in place but that needs Mortar Board's help. Hope College's Alcor chapter has a special tradition along this line—a great way to promote scholarship and Mortar Board.
 - On some campuses Mortar Board spearheads the campuswide Honors Council, which helps all honor societies maintain standards and perform effectively on campus. This is a great service to the institution and shows Mortar Board's leadership. Talk to the Jane K. Smith chapter at San Diego State University.
 - The Barbara Cook chapter at Purdue hosts an intercollegiate volleyball tournament on campus each fall, which highlights the importance of women's athletics and adds to school spirit. It is a full part of the Volleyball Team's intercollegiate schedule, so the visibility is great. If there is a Mortar Board chapter at the institutions competing in the tournament, the chapter also has a great opportunity to host other Mortar Boards who come to watch the tournament.
 - The Telion chapter at Northern Michigan University hosted a leadership event on campus and invited other student organization leaders to attend. Back at Purdue, the Mortar Board Leadership Conference is a very popular event on a Saturday in January, bringing hundreds of student leaders together for a day of leadership programming. In addition to the visibility with students, think of the collateral benefit of having all the speakers learn about Mortar Board and all the good things it does.
 - Host a community service fair on campus, which would pull together the representatives of local community service agencies near campus. They could showcase their needs to student organization representatives. Mortar Board could also coordinate year long the pairing of social service agencies and student organizations if your institution doesn't have an office on campus for this.
 - Have a Mortar Board Clean-up Day on campus. Work with your physical plant director to promote a day for everyone on campus to roll up their sleeves and develop pride in how the campus looks. Sponsor competitions to rehab different landscapes or areas on campus, and give awards to housing units and other student organizations.



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- Host a “top prof” dinner or reception and present teaching awards to outstanding members of the faculty. Each Mortar Board could bring his or her favorite professor. Your institution’s president may be very interested in partnering with the chapter on this event. The Cap and Gown chapter at the University of Wyoming has a very successful event like this each fall.

My chapter is very community-service-focused. How do I shift toward serving our alma mater?

- Get to know the president, provost, and vice president for student life and dean of students personally. These relationships will be important to the prestige of your chapter. Make an appointment with one or all of these campus leaders and ask, “What can Mortar Board do to help you?”
- Make yourself a sought-after group when those in positions of power need advice or help. Have a strong reputation on campus by selecting members of high character and conducting events in a professional manner.
- Identify one need on campus that would enhance the quality of student life—an all-campus lecture series? More school spirit? A résumé-writing festival? Summer job-seeking carnival? Your chapter members know what the campus needs, and Mortar Board could meaningfully fill the gap. Talk with your advisor for ideas! Start with one thing and gradually grow the chapter’s repertoire with a couple of key events each term that are widely recognized and identify Mortar Board as the premier honor society on campus.
- As you are completing your Chapter Action Plan (CAP) think about high level activities that will allow chapter members to bond with one another while getting visibility on campus. For instance, one chapter is thinking about replacing a highway cleanup project and substituting it with a freshman welcome and “how to” program in conjunction with the admissions office. This will give Mortar Board good visibility, assist incoming students, and create awareness of Mortar Board with new students, all in one program. An added plus is that Mortar Board members will be able to work side-by-side to get better acquainted with one another.
- When completing your CAP, you have a real opportunity to think about meaningful programs that are worthy of Mortar Board. Plan one or two each semester, evaluate, and reap the rewards of knowing you have contributed to your alma mater.

Tangible examples of legacies on campus

Some chapters with long ties to their campuses have seen fit to conduct campus beautification projects that help with Mortar Board visibility while at the same time adding to the physical look of campus.

- The Delta Alpha chapter at the University of Missouri Kansas City recently erected a park bench outside the entrance to the union. The bench, sporting a Mortar Board name plate, is a visible reminder of Mortar Board’s presence on campus and provides a nice place for students to spend a little time relaxing.
- The Barbara Cook chapter at Purdue erected a monument to its namesake and former dean of students. It serves as a constant reminder of her legacy. The same chapter built a plaza in honor of another significant woman dean. The Mortar Board Schleman Plaza is a popular meeting place that beautifies campus.
- The Ohio State University has an area on campus called Mortar Board Court, which is used for initiation ceremonies and as a way to remind the campus community how integral Mortar Boards have been to the university’s history. The chapter’s alumni recently raised \$300,000 for a Mortar Board Centennial Reading Room that is a part of the new library renovation. What a spectacular way to leave a legacy.
- The University of Wyoming has an Honors Court, founded and erected by Mortar Board that serves as a public monument to all campus honor societies. The chapter also has a public display honoring four women who were influential to the university and to Mortar Board.

While these chapters all have long histories on their campuses, they all started somewhere! For instance, the Purdue chapter started its campus beautification project by purchasing sturdy trash cans to place at strategic locations on campus. (Not very chic, but a practical contribution to the university that got the administration’s attention and paved the way for later projects). Start small. And dream big!

