

The OTM Challenge Handbook

Adopted from the OTM Challenge from Humboldt
State University during the 2003-2004 Year

Written by John T. Carter
PACURH RTC

Introduction

Welcome to the OTM Challenge Handbook. This was modeled after the OTM Challenge that took place at Humboldt State University in the great region of PACURH during the 2003-2004 year. Before the Challenge, the usual monthly turnout was seven OTMs, if they got any at all. In November of that year, after the Challenge was in full swing, the Michael Wilcoxon Chapter of NRHH received over 70 OTMs!! In November alone!!

This Handbook is meant to be a springboard for NRHH Chapters that would like to increase the quantity and quality of OTMs submitted on the school level. Logically, with this kind of change, the types of OTMs submitted on the regional level will also be of higher caliber.

This Handbook is NOT meant to be the end-all to your problems with student leadership. This won't even solve your OTM problems. You are the element in the equation that solves these problems, not this document. If you need any assistance, please don't hesitate to contact the current Regional Associate Director of NRHH and Recognition.

What are OTMs?

The Of The Month (OTM) program is organized by the National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH), which is a subsidiary of NACURH, Inc. OTMs are meant to recognize separate spectrums of the residence hall leadership world. Most OTMs recognize specific types of people (Student, Resident Assistant, Executive Board Member, etc.), while others recognize programs or communities.

OTM Process

The OTM process starts in the halls, where the local NRHH or RHA advertise for the OTM program. While most OTM programs are organized on the campus level by the campus' NRHH, not every campus has an NRHH but still recognizes and performs the OTM process. This particular process is also more representative of the OTM process tradition at Humboldt State University.

Advertising and Educating about OTMs - Like all programs, the OTM process must be advertised. The publicity is meant to educate about the OTM process itself, convincing people to get involved in the OTM process, and to relay important information. Sometimes, conventional publicity isn't enough, and separate programs, like an OTM Workshop, are necessary to get the necessary amount of information out there.

Collecting OTMs - Once the population is educated on the process, collecting OTMs is the next logical step in the OTM process. Having a way for residents, faculty, and staff to easily turn in OTMs is a must at any school.

Judging OTMs – The main function of OTMs is to recognize the most deserving recipient for a particular category (Student, Social Program, etc.). The only way to do

that is to judge the OTMs submitted for that month for the best of each category to the best of the ability of the OTM Judging Committee of the local campus.

Announcing Winners – After the OTMs have been judged, it is very important to notify the winner, the individual that did the nominating, as well as the residence halls in general. Recognition without anyone knowing that they're being recognized is a pretty shallow gesture, so make sure you let the winners know, and feel proud of what they've done.

After Campus-Wide – After the OTMs have been selected on the campus level, they are submitted to the Regional Associate Director of NRHH and Recognition, where the RAD, with the Regional OTM Committee, will judge all of the OTMs submitted from all of the schools in the region. After winners on the regional level are made, they are announced throughout the region, and those winners are sent up to the national level, where the National OTM Committee (with a representative from each region) will decide on the national winners for that month.

The best way to increase quantity and quality of OTMs is to look at each step in the process, analyze it, and take steps to optimize it.

Advertising and Educating about the OTM Process

Now, publicity is always a tricky matter. Advertise too little and people stay uneducated on the event and advertise too much and people become poster blind. As with all events, posters and fliers are a quick and easy solution, but there's usually something lacking with just that as your primary publicity.

It's very important to analyze the population of who your possible OTM writers are as well as who/what are really eligible for OTMs. These are both highly debated topics, even up on the national level. Is a student who lives off-campus eligible for an OTM? Is a community concert that isn't even on-campus eligible for a Program OTM? These are questions that not all campuses have the luxury to ask, since they're usually not lucky enough to get enough OTMs to start asking these questions. However, if you're going to start targeting whom to advertise and educate about OTMs, these are the kind of questions you'll need to start asking. Since there is, of yet, no definite national answer to these questions, it's more important to come up with the official opinion for your campus.

The first step is to analyze your population of *who can win OTMs*. Once you've looked at that thoroughly, you can think about where this population would go that they would strive as leaders. That's when you can start thinking about what staff, faculty, and students would observe the population and be able to write OTMs about them.

Once you have a good idea on who can win, where they would shine most, and who would watch them shine, begin to think about how you can advertise to these people and educate them of the OTM process as an option for recognition. Placing posters in these particular areas and targeting particular people with fliers is the first step in getting quality OTMs. At least people are now familiar with the concept of OTMs.

The next best step in increasing quality of OTMs is to host something similar to an OTM Workshop. While an open-invitational OTM Workshop is a great thing, there is

definitely something to be said for going to organizations and hosting OTM Workshops. Going to Residential Life staff meetings and informing RAs and other Res Life staff members on OTMs and the OTM process will turn out a bunch more OTMs than just giving the RAs fliers for their communities.

Now it's your turn to think about what would work best for your campus and residence halls.

Collecting OTMs

Now, having a hundred quality OTMs written is a great thing, but unless it's super convenient to collect these OTMs, a lot are going to be lost in the process from being written to being judged. The ultimate answer is an electronic submission system. However, like all systems, it's not perfect. There will always be people that refuse to utilize an electronic system, because they prefer paper systems. No matter how superior the system is, there will always be a group of people that would prefer a paper system. One might venture say that an optimal system is to have the primary source of collection being an electronic system (website) and a secondary source being a paper collection system.

Working with a web developer, establishing a website with a simple submission form that is easy to navigate to is a must. Mass-advertising that site will make turning in OTMs electronically very easily. For paper submission, having a centralized address for mailing in OTMs is also a must. Having a few posters placed in the residence halls where people can submit OTMs in pockets or something is also a good idea. Once again, customizing this process to your campus is a must.

Judging OTMs

Once again, I need to stress the differences that different campuses have, and that the following example is exclusive to Humboldt State University. Before the OTM Challenge came to Humboldt, OTMs were exclusively judged by the school's chapter of NRHH. In a system where the population of individuals that can judge OTMs is topped off at 20 and is not decided on their literary prowess, it gets more difficult to judge OTMs as the quantity increases. It was noticed that people who repeatedly judged OTMs became better OTM writers, because they became more aware of what people were looking for in an OTM, and were able to apply that knowledge to their own OTM writing. By opening up OTM judging to more than just NRHH members, we were able to cut down on the stress on the NRHH members, who were busy already, a diversity of individuals were able to contribute to OTM judging, and more people were able to have their OTM writing benefit from the judging.

However, searching for new methods of judging OTMs is also highly advised as a way to increase the number of judges. One possible approach that I have yet to see, but am very interested to see, is the utilization of online forum technology as a way to judge OTMs. The OTMs could be posted online somewhere and discussion could be done for a few days over forums, a separate forum for each OTM, with judging done over a vote done on the last day utilizing forms. This is just one of many possibilities.

Announcing Winners

OTMs were designed to recognize individuals, so, arguably, announcing the winners of OTMs is the most important part of the OTM process. Making the announcements very apparent and very visible is a must in a successful OTM process. If nominators feel that the nominee won't get any recognition from the OTM being written, then that will discourage OTMs from being written. Reflecting the national and regional approach to recognition, it's advisable to give certificates to the winners of OTMs for them to hold onto for posterity. Also, having a bulletin board or something in a public place with a lot of foot traffic that announces the winners to everyone. The bulletin board is also useful because it can double as publicity for the OTM process. As always, utilize the resources available on your campus and customize this process for your needs.

Conclusion

Well y'all, this has been a quick synopsis and generalization of the OTM Challenge. I hope that the handbook was useful for your school and the OTM process there. Utilizing this handbook, online OTM resources, and your own resourcefulness you should be able to revamp the OTM process somehow. If you need any help at any time, please contact the RAD or me, John T. Carter, at pacurhrtc@gmail.com. Thank you, and please let me know if this handbook was useful to you.