

September 21, 2004

Howdy!

Running a Merit Badge University is a challenging and rewarding experience. An APO-sponsored MBU is often the only opportunity local youth have to work on multiple badges simultaneously apart from summer camp. An MBU gives them a valuable advancement opportunity, as well as allowing the Brothers in your Chapter to put their college educations to work in a strong well-appreciated service setting.

Following is a “best practices” guide to pulling off a MBU. It is organized timeline-style, to let you plan ahead. As you’ll find, the success of this event relies heavily on the planning. The day itself will be over and done with before you know it. It’s the before- and after- that take time.

As you go, remember to take advantage of the resources available on the Region 1 Scouting & Youth Services site: www.apor1.org/pages/scouting. This will keep you from reinventing the wheel and allow you to focus on the task at hand.

I hope you find this guide useful in the road ahead.

YiS,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Ritchie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Adam Ritchie
Scouting Coordinator
Region 1, Alpha Phi Omega

(One way to) run a Boy Scout Merit Badge University

At the end of the semester

- When the whole Chapter is together — usually during elections — pass around a list of every merit badge in the catalogue. Two great sites for this list, merit badge requirements and Eagle-required badges are:
 - www.meritbadge.com
 - <http://usscouts.org/usscouts/meritbadges.asp>
- Ask that the Brothers write their names next to all badges that they think they can teach, based on their majors, hobbies and interests.

During semester break

- Using the list that you compiled at the last chapter meeting, pick 12-15 badges that you feel Brothers would be able to teach based on their strengths and popularity of the selections
- Use the Interactive Region 1 Scouting & Youth Services Map on:
www.apor1.org/pages/scouting
to obtain contact information for the BSA councils nearest you.

At your first Chapter planning meeting

- Present the available dates for Merit Badge Day and pick one with the Chapter. Make sure you give yourself at least two months for planning and preparation.

During the Spring semester

- Find out what badges are most appropriate for people to teach, and who would be available for what. Begin to whittle it down to between eight and 10 badges — or more if you've got the interest from the Brotherhood.
 - It is recommended that you double the amount of required badges than non-required. The required badges typically get the most participants.
- Create a flyer advertising the event. An example can be found on the Region 1 Scouting & Youth Services site. It should contain the following information:
 - The location
 - The date
 - A time schedule for the day, including:
 - Registration

- An APO info meeting for leaders and parents early on in the day
 - Badges and times offered
 - The APO Brother's email address who is organizing Merit Badge Day for further information.
 - The ceiling on class size.
 - This is based on volunteer interest. Try not to assign more than five scouts to one Brother.
 - A request that the boys complete all long-term requirements, requirements involving travel and requirements involving a written report before the event.
 - This way, they can bring everything for the Brothers to inspect and sign, completing the badge that day.
 - Online registration information:
 - Create a dedicated Hotmail or Yahoo email address with a password that both you and the Brother handling registration can manage.
 - Something along the lines of [apo_badge@hotmail.com] works best.
 - A request that scoutmasters submit the following:
 - A list of all the boys attending from their troop
 - The badges each one wants to take
 - The round they'd like to take the badge
 - The scoutmaster's name, phone number, email address and snail mail address.
- Get the word out in the Scouting community
 - Submit the flyer to the main council office for distribution. The office should do all the work getting it out to the troops for you.
 - Appoint a Brother who will handle registration, use the hotmail account and compile an Excel spreadsheet like the one found on the Region 1 Scouting & Youth Services site.
- Send council a request for "X" number of merit badge books for your counselors to use and "X" number of counselor registration forms (which every Brother teaching a badge must fill out).
 - Ask that they be donated.
 - This project should not cost the Chapter a dime. The Chapter is providing the council a fantastic service for which they should be very supportive — both in attendance and financially.
 - Once the materials come in from council, distribute them to the Chapter by placing the following in the APO office:
 - An envelope for personalized, blank counselor registration forms
 - An envelope for completed counselor registration forms
 - A box with all the merit badge books with the counselor's name written in the inside cover.
- As sign-ups roll in, finalize your list of counselors.
 - Try to adhere to the five-scouts-to-a-counselor rule of thumb
 - Open the project to the Pledges
- Remind the merit badge groups to meet and come up with a plan for how to teach their badge. Clear a policy with the vice president of service that they'll receive service hours for the meeting, in addition to the project itself. Make this known.

- Visit your student center and programming service office to reserve rooms in a lecture hall that has the space and equipment your counselors will need. Don't know how many rooms to reserve? A sample room roster can be found on the Region 1 Scouting & Youth Services site.
 - Designate rooms for:
 - The classes (make sure these have computer consoles in them)
 - A "Counselors' Lounge" (make sure this has a computer console in it)
 - A "Parents' Place" (stock it with coffee and/or donuts if possible)
 - An APO info meeting

As the event gets closer

- Contact the scoutmasters and request adult leader and parental aid in crowd control and help filling out blue cards.
- Ask your Chapter's corresponding secretary to write up a news release about the event and distribute/pitch it to the campus newspaper, the assignment desk of the town's local paper, the newsdesk of the town's local broadcast affiliates and any other media outlet you can think of.
 - An example of an MBU news release can be found on the R1 Scouting & Youth Services Site.
- Request guest logins and passwords for classroom computer systems from Campus Media Services. Also request combination codes for the computer media cabinets if you will need to open these to access the computers.
- Notify the Campus Parking and Transit Services and ask that they issue a waiver for whichever lot your attendees will be using that day.
- Notify Campus Public Safety and make sure they know what time to have the building unlocked for you. To be extra-safe, have a Brother run a copy of your room confirmation to their office the weekday before the event.
- Print out signs detailing the schedule of events in each classroom.
- Print out a master itinerary for the day and make at least one copy for every troop you're expecting.
 - Examples of both can be found on the R1 Scouting & Youth Services Site.

The day of the event

- Head down to the APO office at least an hour and a half before the event begins and pick up the following:
 - All the promo materials you would use for a Rush table, i.e. scrapbooks and pamphlets.
 - Walkie-talkies (if your Chapter has them)
 - A roll of tape for hanging signs

- On your way to where the event is being held:
 - Post signs from the parking lot to the hall, pointing attendees in the right direction
- Upon arrival at the hall:
 - Hang your Chapter's APO banner in the entranceway
 - Post signs guiding attendees to the registration desk
 - Set up your registration table, to be manned at all times by the Brother you've placed in charge of registration
 - Post a few copies of the full-day itinerary on the wall of either side of the registration desk
 - Post signs outside the classrooms, detailing the room's schedule for the day
 - Pre-boot and login all computers for the counselors' use
 - Set up the "Counselors' Lounge"
 - On the room's LCD projector, display the "Example of a Blue Card" file found on the Region 1 Scouting & Youth Services site
 - This will let the counselors know how to properly fill out the cards
 - Designate an area where the counselors will drop off all their completed blue cards/partial and inspected work for each badge. Make sure they know to sort the piles by troop number.

A NOTE ON BLUE CARDS:

Don't even *think* of trying to get anything back to the scouts the day of the event! Not blue cards, not inspected work and definitely not badges,. It is a major headache, as there will be dozens upon dozens of scouts running around, making it nearly impossible to track down individuals. Make no exceptions, and above all, be patient with impatient parents!

Have your counselors collect *everything*...blue cards, work, etc. Tell the scoutmasters, parents and boys that council office will be mailing everything to their troops. Have your counselors leave everything in orderly piles — organized by troop — for you in the Counselors' Lounge.

At the end of the day

- Organize and separate all the work and blue cards in the Counselors' Lounge.
- Pack up and clean up. Leave the building in better shape than you found it.

The following day

- Run all the piles down to council office. Ask that they notify all troops that it is there for pickup, or to be mailed at the scoutmaster's request.
- Email your list of scoutmasters, letting them know that everything has left your hands and is at their council office.
- Send a big "Thank You!" to your counselors and any Brothers who helped out with organizing the project.
- Engage in super-relaxing activities for several days, before laying plans for your next Scouting and Youth Services project!