**S.O. College Starter/Helper Guide**

**(Activating College Students)**

**What is it?**
S.O. College connects college students and individuals with intellectual disabilities through sport to build friendships and help lead the social justice movement of Special Olympics. Created by college students for college students the network seeks the membership of campuses that share the common goals of enhancing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and building a more accepting world for all.

There are two main initiatives of S.O. College. The first initiative is inter-collegiate sports: inclusive teams (composed of individuals with and without intellectual disabilities) competing against other inclusive teams from different colleges. The second initiative is Spread the Word to End the Word™, an ongoing campaign to end the pejorative use of the R-word – retard(ed) – and raise awareness of its dehumanizing effects. In addition, many S.O. College chapters choose to add their own initiatives through additional sport, advocacy or fundraising components.

**Mission:** The S.O. College network unites college students and people with intellectual disabilities to enhance their lives through sport, friendship, advocacy and other activities.

There are many levels of successful S.O. College programs. Each level varies in intensity of work and commitment. As your S.O. College program grows you can guide your advancement through the levels. Below are descriptions of each level’s expected involvement in the two main initiatives of S.O. College: inclusive sports and Spread the Word Campaign. These levels are designed as guidelines – each new level includes the activities in the levels before it. You should always consider additional opportunities to get your chapter involved such as: fundraising, being “Fans in the Stands”, and volunteering at your local Special Olympics Program.

**Levels of S.O. College program**

**Level 1**

**Level 1:**

**Inclusive Sports:** Volunteers from your chapter help out at local Special Olympics practices and events (weekly, bi-weekly, etc.) as coaches, partners or in a separate volunteer role.

**Spread the Word:** Set up a table on campus to raise awareness and understanding.

**Level 2:**

**Inclusive Sports:** Organize weekly or bi-weekly informal games of inclusive sports (basketball or soccer), and training sessions for athletes to develop skills.

**Spread the Word:** Set up tables around campus giving individuals a chance to sign a banner pledging not to say “retard(ed)”. Encourage them to visit [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org).

**Level 3:**

**Inclusive Sports:** Start an inclusive league at your college or university with multiple teams that play each other in basketball or soccer throughout the season. This should include scheduled practices and games that happen on a weekly basis.

**Spread the Word:** Work with professors at your college to have members from your S.O. College program travel to different classes and give a short presentation on the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign.

**Level 4:**

**Inclusive Sports:** Plan and host tournament(s) inviting local colleges with inclusive teams to compete. Schools that do not have their own inclusive sports programs yet can come to the event to learn how to get their own program started.

**Spread the Word:** Host a youth rally. Invite guest speakers, local talent, and an athlete to talk about the importance of the Spread the Word campaign. Advertise the event to students and if possible, open it to the public. (You can also link this event to your inclusive sports tournament).

**How to start/Where to start?**

(\* required)

**Get in contact** (the more connections you have the better)

* with students at your school (to find a core group) \*
* with State Special Olympics \*
* with local Special Olympics (to find athletes interested) \*
* with clubs and organizations at your school (Best Buddies, community service clubs, Greek, etc.)
* with school administrators (president, Dean, etc.)
* with academic departments (School of Education, Exercise Science/Athletic Trainers, etc.)
* with others involved in S.O. College and find out best practices
* with local business to sponsor or advertise your event or program

**Get others involved** (Raise awareness of S.O. College initiatives)

* Present S.O. College to other clubs (Best Buddies, Greek, etc.)
* Print flyers and post them
* Give presentations to clubs or in classes – inspire others to join
* Create a Facebook page - add all of your friends and leave “public” for your university’s network (Note: Monitor the site to remove any unwanted comments/content)
* Showcase inclusive team(s) at other events
* Talk with your local Special Olympics program and ask if other students have volunteered – these individuals may be interested in S.O. College

**Planning**

* Decide what kind of event(s) you would like to host (Spread the Word, Fundraiser, Sports event, etc.)
* Use others as resources – don’t be afraid to ask
* Utilize existing systems (multimedia, flyers, class presentations, school newspaper, etc.)

**Have fun**

* S.O. College is about having fun in an inclusive environment!

**Examples and Ideas**

* **Fundraiser**
	+ To raise money for event(s) or local Special Olympics (examples below)
		- Polar plunge – Individuals (students, school groups, corporate teams, etc.) collect pledges from donors to jump into a body of water during the winter months to raise money. Visit <http://www.polarplunge.com/> for more details.
		- Bocce-fest – Create a tournament teams of two can enter to play bocce ball in a single elimination tournament format. Winners receive prizes that are donated or that are purchased with part of earnings of the tournament. (You can even make the teams inclusive.)
		- Indoor golf – Have several local businesses come and create a mini golf course (they can even buy advertising space). Once complete charge attendees to come and play.
		- Hold raffles during event(s) (50/50, baskets, etc.)
		- 5K run or walk-a-thon –people sign up and each of the runners have to get sponsors and raise a certain amount of money to participate
		- Duck Derby Race – sell individual ducks to race in a body of water (river, pool, lake, etc.) and the winners ducks get a prize.
* **Inclusive sports event (monthly, weekly, large tournament, etc.)**
	+ - Team up with local Special Olympics competitions and volunteer during weekly events (soccer, basketball, bocce, etc.).
* Schedule days where you invite individuals with and without intellectual disabilities to play together in an informal setting.
* Training Sessions – Athletes learn new skills that correspond with the sport
	+ - * Invite varsity athletes from school to help run session – these athletes are sometimes local heroes to your athletes
			* Invite club level athletes or possibly intramural athletes to be a part of the training.
	+ Compete against other college’s inclusive teams
	+ Invite local high schools to play your team or to participate as fans
	+ Tournaments
		- Invite local colleges to showcase the program – great way to get S.O. College information out to schools that haven’t heard of it
		- Invite nearby S.O. College chapters to participate
* **Spread the Word to End the Word™ event (R-word.org)**
	+ An action and awareness campaign that engages youth by raising awareness about the hurtful and dehumanizing effects of the words “retard(ed)”.
	+ Changes attitudes and encourages people to focus on “respect” as the new R-word
	+ Materials:

How can I take this to the next level?

* + - Banners
		- Poster for people to sign as they pledge
		- PowerPoint Presentations
		- Giveaways (bracelets, t-shirts, stickers, etc.)
		- Computer access at tables to pledge at
		- Papers to give out so individuals know how to pledge at home
		- Host a “Spirit Week” that corresponds with the annual Spread the Word to End the Word™ Day of awareness(example below)
			* **Monday:** Create posters and post them around campus
			* **Tuesday:** Demo S.O. College sports team and have them play exhibition games
			* **Wednesday:** Have students present a short presentation in their classes to inform students of STW (with permission from professor beforehand)
			* **Thursday:** Schedule a presentation in an on-campus facility with guest speaker (Make sure to advertise well)
			* **Friday:** Have tables set up around campus with computers allowing students to pledge online. You can have a large banner for them to sign as well. (Giveaways: STW bracelets, sticker, etc.)

**References:**

Special Olympics

[www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)

S.O. College

[www.specialolympics.org/so\_college.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/so_college.aspx)

[www.facebook.com/SpecialOlympicsCollege](http://www.facebook.com/SpecialOlympicsCollege)

Project UNIFY®

[www.specialolympics.org/project\_unify.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/project_unify.aspx)

Spread the Word to End the Word™

[www.r-word.org/](http://www.r-word.org/)

S.O. College Programs

Northwestern: <http://groups.northwestern.edu/specialolympics/>

Notre Dame: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Special-Olympics-Notre-Dame/119942958338>

Villanova: <http://specialolympics.villanova.edu/>