

# Homecoming

High school homecoming traditions vary by geographic area, and economic demographics. However, many of the tried and true homecoming activities prevail across state boundaries and neighborhood economic divisions. Homecoming events are generally centered on a football game during the early to middle of the fall season.

A community pep rally is a common high school homecoming tradition. Instead of holding a pep rally during the end of the school day, an evening pep rally is held, with the community invited to attend. Many high schools hold a bonfire as a part of a homecoming pep rally. During such a pep rally, the high school band and cheerleaders entertain the crowd, and lead spirit activities. A homecoming parade often precedes the pep rally, or the game itself. Some schools have a "tailgate" party in the school parking lot before the game, with special activities and entertainment provided by school and community organizations.

The high school football team is introduced at a pep rally, with the coach and select members of the team addressing both the student body, and the crowd of general community members. Homecoming pep rallies are typically held the evening before the big game, and include multiple school groups in the event. Food is often sold as a school fundraiser, or given away to those in attendance. Roasting hot dogs and marshmallows over the bonfire is also a common high school homecoming activity. Some schools throw a replica of the opposing schools mascot into the fire to excite the crowd.

A homecoming queen and court are an often-anticipated aspect of the annual homecoming activities. Students vote in advance of the homecoming game for homecoming contestants. Some schools include members of the male student body, or football team in the homecoming royalty contest. Student election styles vary, from a simple vote on a piece of paper, to candidates campaigning for votes with signs, or at an assembly.

Before the start of the high school homecoming football game, the candidates are introduced to the crowd, and are often paraded around the field area. During pre-game activities at half time, the winners are announced and crowned.

During the week of a high school homecoming, spirit theme days are often a part of the annual celebration. Students dress according to the established theme, and win prizes for their participation. The Friday before the homecoming game is generally "Spirit Day" with the student body dressing in school colors and wearing adornments or face paint to show their school pride.



The University of Missouri's first Homecoming game in 1911

**Homecoming** is the tradition of welcoming back alumni of a school. It most commonly refers to a tradition in many universities, colleges and high schools in North America. It usually includes activities for students and alumni, such as sports and culture events and a parade through the streets of the city or town.

## United States

Homecoming is an annual tradition of the United States. People, towns, high schools and colleges come together, usually in late September or early October, to welcome back alumni and former residents. It is built around a central event, such as a banquet and, most often, a game of American football, or, on occasion, basketball, ice hockey or soccer. When celebrated by schools, the activities vary widely. However, they usually consist of a football game played on a school's home football field, activities for students and alumni, a parade featuring the school's marching band and sports teams, and the coronation of a Homecoming Queen (and at many schools, a Homecoming King). A dance commonly follows the game. When attached to a football game, Homecoming traditionally occurs on the team's return from the longest road trip of the season. The game itself, whether it be football or another sport, will typically feature the home team playing a considerably weaker opponent. The game is supposed to be an "easy win" and thus weaker schools will sometimes play lower division schools.

## Origins

The history of the University of Missouri Homecoming can be traced back to the 1911 Kansas vs. Missouri football game, when the Missouri Tigers first faced off against the Kansas Jayhawks in the first installment of the Border War, which is also the oldest Division 1 college football rivalry west of the Mississippi River. The intense rivalry originally took place at neutral sites, usually in Kansas City, Missouri, until a new conference regulation was announced that required intercollegiate football games to be played on collegiate campuses. To renew excitement in the rivalry, ensure adequate attendance at the new location, and celebrate the first meeting of the two teams on the Mizzou campus in Columbia, Missouri, Mizzou Athletic Director Chester Brewer

invited all alumni to "come home" for the game in 1911. Along with the football game, the celebration included a parade and spirit rally with bonfire. Nearly 10,000 fans watched the Tigers and Jayhawks play to a 3–3 tie. This helped minimize losses incurred by moving the game from Kansas City but still represented an economic setback. Brewer hope to rescind the new conference rule and return the game to Kansas City. At a meeting of presidents from the Missouri Valley Conference schools, the University of Missouri was the only conference school to vote against the regulation.

Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana) held its first homecoming event during the week of June 19–24, 1908. The following year the event was held in conjunction with the IU-Purdue football game.

At least two collegiate homecoming celebrations predate the University of Missouri football game homecoming event. Baylor University in Waco, Texas has a homecoming history that dates back to 1909 including what is considered to be the first collegiate homecoming including a parade, reunion parties and an afternoon football game (the final game of the 1909 season), a tradition that continued and celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2009. There was a gap between 1910 and 1915 when there was no homecoming event, however there has been continuity since 1915. The University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign first held a homecoming event in 1910, celebrating the 100th anniversary in 2010. The event was held annually except for the 1918 season.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

## **Traditions**

### **Homecoming Court**

The Homecoming Court is a representative group of students that, in a coeducational institution, consists of a King and Queen, and possibly Prince(s) and Princess(es). In a single-sex institution, the Homecoming Court will usually consist of only a King and a Prince (for a male school) or a Queen and a Princess (for a female school), although some schools may choose to join with single-sex schools of the opposite sex to elect the Homecoming Court jointly.

Generally, the King and Queen are students completing their final years of study at their school (also called seniors), while the Prince and Princess are underclassmen, often with a Prince/Princess for each grade. Recently, some high schools have chosen to add categories, such as Duke and Duchess, to extend the representation of students to include a category in which students with special needs are elected. In high school, 17- or 18-year-old students in their final year are represented by a King or Queen; in college, students who are completing their final year of study, usually between 21 and 23 years old.

Classmates traditionally nominate students who have done a lot to contribute to their school, then students vote for members of the Court from the nominees. Once the Homecoming Court candidates are announced, the entire student body votes for the Queen and King. The voting is often conducted by secret ballot, but other methods may also be used by certain schools.

Local rules determine when the Homecoming Queen and King are crowned. Sometimes, the big announcement comes at a pep rally, school assembly, or public ceremony one or more days before the football game. Other schools crown their royalty at the Homecoming football game, a dance or other school event.

Often, the previous year's Queen and King are invited back to crown their successors. If they are absent for whatever reason, someone else—usually, another previous Queen or King, a popular teacher, or other designated person—will perform those duties. Usually, the Queen is crowned first, followed by the King. The crowning method also varies by school.

Homecoming court members who are not crowned king or queen are often called escorts or royalty. They are often expected to participate in the week's activities as well. At some schools, a Homecoming Prince/Princess, Duke/Duchess, etc. (often underclassmen nominated by their classmates) are crowned along with the King and Queen; sometimes, middle school and junior high students may partake in the high school activities.

### **Parade**

Many Homecoming celebrations include a parade. Students often select the grand marshal based on his/her service and support to the school and/or community. The parade includes the school's marching band and different school organizations floats created by the classes and organizations and most of the sports get a chance to be in the parade. Every class prepares a float which corresponds with the Homecoming theme or related theme of school spirit as assign by school administrators. In addition, the Homecoming Court takes part in the parade, often riding together in one or more convertibles as part of the parade. The parade is often part of a series of activities scheduled for that specific day, which can also include a pep rally, bonfire, snake dance, and other activities for students and alumni. That can include many more things that can stay still with the 'Homecoming' start with the cases.

### **Tailgate**

At most major colleges and universities, the football game and preceding tailgate party are the most widely recognized and heavily attended events of the week. Alumni gather from all around the world to return to their Alma Mater and reconnect with one another and take part in the festivities. Students, alumni, businesses, and members of the community set up tents in parking lots, fields, and streets near the stadium to cook out, play games, socialize, binge drink, and even enjoy live music in many instances. These celebrations often last straight through the game for those who do not have tickets but still come to take part in the socializing and excitement of the homecoming atmosphere. Most tents even include television or radio feeds of the game for those without tickets.

### **Picnic**

Sometimes during the school week, a picnic could occur. The picnic is very similar to the tailgate party, but it occurs after school or during the school's lunch period.

## Dress-up days

Throughout the week, many schools (particularly high schools) engage in special dress-up days, sometimes called "Spirit Week", where students are allowed to wear clothing suitable to the theme (e.g., 80s day, toga day, cowboy day, nerd day, pirate day, Rat Pack Day, flannel Friday, What-not-to-wear Wednesday) leading to the homecoming. Students traditionally wear clothing with their school's name, or clothing and makeup of their school's colors on Friday.

## Rallies

Many schools hold a rally during homecoming week, often one or more nights before the game. The events vary, but may include skits, games, introduction of the homecoming court (and coronation of the King and Queen if that is the school's tradition), and comments from the football players and/or coach about the upcoming game.

At some schools, the Homecoming rally ends with a bonfire (in which old wood structures, the rival school's memorabilia and other items are burned in a controlled fire.) Many colleges and high schools no longer hold bonfires because of accidents that have occurred surrounding these events in the past. The most well known accident took place in 1999, when 12 students were killed and 27 others were injured at Texas A&M University when a 40-foot-tall (12 m) pile of logs that had been assembled for a bonfire collapsed.<sup>[3]</sup> However, this incident was not associated with homecoming—A&M is one of the few schools that does not organize a homecoming, although it has many unique traditions. The bonfire was associated with the annual rivalry game between A&M and the University of Texas.

## Homecoming dance



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The Homecoming Dance—usually the culminating event of the week (for high schools)—is a formal or informal event, either at the school or an off-campus location. The venue is decorated, and either a disc jockey or band is hired to play music. In many ways, it is a fall prom. Homecoming dances could be informal as well just like standard school dances. At high schools, the homecoming dances are sometimes held in the high school gymnasium or outside in a large field.

Since most colleges are too large to facilitate a campus-wide dance, these events are usually handled instead by student organizations such as fraternities, sororities, and residential colleges. Because football and alumni events are the focal points of collegiate homecoming, dances often take place during a different week when schedules are more permitting, or not at all.

## Competitions

At the high school level, students generally compete by grade level in events such as the spirit days, parade floats, and powder puff football. The competition at the collegiate level is mainly between Greek-letter organizations and, to a lesser degree, residence halls. At most larger schools, fraternities and sororities compete on parade floats, house decorations, skits, talent competitions, and even service events such as blood drives or food drives. Sometimes on coronation night, some schools have games that they play between classes. Such events include the pyramid, the 3 legged race, the pop chug, and tug of war.

### **Smaller school homecomings**

While most schools schedule their Homecoming activities around football, smaller schools that do not field a football team may plan the annual event at another time of the year. In these instances, basketball, ice hockey or soccer serves as the "big game" for students and alumni. Often in smaller towns with smaller populations, the parade is omitted.

At schools without athletic programs, the centerpiece event is usually a banquet, where alumni are recognized. This format is also used for alumni events of high schools that have either closed or consolidated with other high schools; the high school classes continue to meet and celebrate their years at their now-defunct alma mater.

### **Court warming**

In some parts of the country, high school basketball has gained a homecoming celebration of its own. Often referred to as *Winter Homecoming*, *Hoopcoming*, *Coronation*, *Snowcoming*, "Colors Day," or *Court warming* (the latter is especially prominent in parts of Missouri), it usually includes rallies, dress-up days, special dinners, king and queen coronations, and other winter-friendly activities typically associated with football homecoming.

## **Canada**

The best-known and largest homecoming weekends are held by the University of Western Ontario, the University of Manitoba, McGill University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Trent University, University of Guelph, University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University each year. Canadian homecoming weekends are often centred on a football game but are also filled with events such as "pancake keggers" and parades.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, communities have a "Come Home Year" where people who have moved away from their town come back from across Canada. In 2000, there was a provincial "Come Home Year", where many people came back to visit their various communities.

Homecomings are popular among Canadian high schools. Newmarket High School, London South Collegiate Institute, Banting Memorial High School and Earl Haig Secondary School are examples of known schools in Ontario to arrange homecomings. Upper Canada College also has a longstanding homecoming tradition, although the event is referred to as "A-Day" (Association Day).

## Other

The term "homecoming" can also refer to the special services conducted by some religious congregations, particularly by many smaller American Protestant churches, to celebrate church heritage and welcome back former members or pastors. They are often held annually, but are sometimes held as one-time-only events, to celebrate the occasion.

Homecoming should not be confused with prom, as they usually occur at different times of the year. Homecoming usually occurs in the fall, and prom usually occurs in the spring.

## Mums & Garters

In some states, specifically Texas, Homecoming can be signified and exemplified by mums and garters. These decorative spirit symbols are usually made of at least the following but aren't limited to:

1. A fake flower and backing
2. Ribbons of all kinds within the colors of the school or specific grade

Extra decoratives to add to a mum or garter can be:

1. Trinkets such as a drum for band, a hat for drill team, or pom-poms for cheerleading
2. Letters spelling the individual's name, their grade, "HOMECOMING", their graduation year, any activities they are involved in, etc.
3. Feather boas or feathers
4. Flashing lights attached to ribbons or fake flower
5. Teddy bear or school mascot in stuffed animal form hot glued on to the fake flower
6. Garland to put on the fake flower or intertwine within the ribbons
7. Braided ribbons or any intricate ribbon creation
8. 3"-4" folded ribbons stapled onto and around the backing of the fake flower
9. Anything else that looks decorative and spirited

## See also

- Winter Formal

## References

1. ^ "Baylor Alumni Association". Baylor Alumni Association. Retrieved 2012-04-30.
2. ^ "Baylor Alumni Association". Baylor Alumni Association. 1909-11-24. Retrieved 2012-04-30.
3. ^ "Safety concerns hope to protect bonfire for future generations". TheDartmouth.com. 2006-10-13. Retrieved 2012-04-30.