

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION TASK FORCE REPORT

PROJECT OVERVIEW & OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Building the “Engaged, Embedded and Evolving” university community envisioned by the UMass Dartmouth strategic plan requires involvement by an undergraduate student population that is fully prepared to embrace the concepts that define the University’s emerging identity. The New Student Orientation Task Force has developed a series of principles that we believe will foster full engagement by our students in the UMass Dartmouth community. These principles have guided our work throughout the discussions of the last two months. Associated with these principles are a group of developmental tasks we identified for new students to address in making their transition to the university environment. We have described these developmental tasks with specific related examples that may be translated into Orientation Program sessions.

Underlying our work was the fundamental idea that the Orientation Program should primarily serve as a bridge between the high school and college-level *academic* experiences. While the personal, social, and cultural transitions to the college experience should remain a dimension of the orientation program, we believe that the centerpiece of the program should shift in the direction of preparing students for the academic experience. Although the Student Affairs Division is an appropriate sponsor for the Orientation Program, in order to achieve a strengthened academic focus, a more significant faculty presence and a University-wide commitment to participation are essential. Another important principle we adopted was that the high school to college transition is evolutionary and occurs over an extended period of time and therefore cannot be entirely accomplished during a one or two-day program. We believe, instead, that it should encompass a timeframe extending from spring Discovery Days through the end of the freshman year in college. The developmental tasks we identified should be addressed programmatically throughout this yearlong cycle.

THE CHARGE

The charge we received for our work identified three central priorities for our consideration: 1) identification of program goals, 2) analysis of the effectiveness of the current program, and 3) development of recommendations for program structure and staffing.

1) PROGRAM GOALS

The outcome of our efforts centered on the identification of a set of core principles on which to base all future orientation efforts. These core principles were further specified into sets of content principles and process principles:

Process Principles
Orientation is inclusive of acceptance through 1 st day of class
Program is principle based rather than personality based
Activities are developmentally appropriate
Orientation is an authentic experience
New students provided with personal attention
Activities are focused on small group experience
New students are provided with competent facilitation
New students are empowered to make decisions
Timing of activities is appropriate both in terms of when and length

Content Principles
New students understand academic requirements
New students provided with introduction to University culture

Concept of learning community is introduced
Future possibilities are introduced
Foster sense of civic engagement and commitment

From these content principles we then defined thirteen developmental tasks that high school students should master in order to be fully prepared for a successful college academic experience. While these are described in detail below, essentially they embrace the idea that students need to take responsibility for understanding the distinctions that differentiate the high school experience from the college experience. Just as an academic experience should have associated learning outcomes, the developmental tasks we defined appear to have identifiable competencies associated with their mastery. The following are the thirteen skill sets and understandings that we believe students should have internalized if they are to function effectively in the UMass Dartmouth community. They, in turn, suggest the specific programs that will constitute an effective New Student Orientation Program.

Developmental Task	Description of Task
Differentiate High School and Univ. experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Structure of learning experience-less day to day -Requires advance planning and time mgt. -Relationship with faculty-how to relate and communicate -How to deal with adapting to varying class sizes/possible feeling of anonymity
Take ownership for academic experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Customized program plan for your academic success -Role of and relationship with faculty advisor -Develop confidence to engage faculty when you need help -Getting back on track after falling behind
Identify your specific needs and resources to meet them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Self diagnosis/be able to identify gaps in skill sets and match with corresponding University resources
Understand need for balance of time commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Understand time demands of a full credit course load including need for study, group project demands, etc. -Understand feasibility of part time work outside of academic commitments
Understand financial implications (missing classes, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Understand how much it costs to attend school including specifics of how much each class period costs you -Understand importance of paying bill to progress academically -Know how to be responsible consumer with spending, credit cards, etc. -Understand that financial aid packages require Satisfactory Academic Progress which may be stricter than academic requirements
Understand institutional language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Academic Terms -Language of higher ed. -What is Student Affairs
Know how to communicate w/faculty/staff/peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learn to use web directory -Email protocol -Civility in communication -Office Hours -In person vs. email communication -Making appointments -How to address front line staff -Cultural communication issues

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How University will communicate with you -Follow up -Keeping records of communication
Develop sense of belonging to a community you understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Proximity and intimacy of peers in residential community -Facebook and online communities -Residence Hall culture -Commuter culture -Quality of and sense of community within academic dept. -Communities within communities/understanding infrastructure -Developing connections -Understand regional community
Develop skill sets to function in a diverse community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Civility -Respect -Protocols -Personal/physical space -Tolerance vs. acceptance -Academic freedom – rights and responsibilities within a free, open exchange of ideas -Difference of opinion vs. being disrespectful -Asking difficult questions -Code of Conduct -Recognition of one's identity and place -Family values – development of your personal values -University values -Recognizing varying abilities -How to address your fears -Our diversity is an adventure
Take ownership of administrative function responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Deadlines -Taking care of business -Navigate University
Take ownership for social responsibilities/experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Code of Conduct -Sexual Assault Information -Living successfully in a communal environment -Health and safety of self and others
Will be prepared for first semester of University career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -COIN -UMass Pass -Bar Code for Library -Know who advisor is and how to contact -What to bring to school -What to bring to class -Where to park -Computer specification guidelines -Check lists
Gain appreciation for potential of your Univ. exp.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Info. from upper-class students and alums -Access to current students -Out of classroom opportunities and services -Stats. about grads -Identify famous alums

2) THE CURRENT PROGRAM

The current program consists of five 2 day sessions in the month of June with a concurrent program for families of new students. Sessions are designated for the colleges and there are specific sessions for College Now and Pathways students. Each session is attended by 350-450 students and the concurrent family program is attended by 100-150 participants. One day transfer sessions are scheduled in June, August and January.

The existing Orientation Program seems to have been successful in building a sense of community within the first year student ranks and to have served as a reasonably effective program for preparing students for the social aspects of University life. It is staffed by thirty student leaders who represent the diversity of academic and co-curricular offerings of the University. The Orientation Coordinator and Orientation Leader positions are desirable and staff are selected through a competitive hiring process.

We were alarmed, however, by the absence of a clear academic tone, the marginal role played by the faculty and the overall sense that the program is not well suited to preparing students for the academic challenges they will face as they enter the university community. A reputation that the program has developed for excessive emphasis on fun and socializing seems to be somewhat well founded. Each year the program is built around a theme which is a common practice in the field of new student orientation. The themes, however, are selected by the student staff and have limited emphasis on academic achievement.

Also problematic is the excessive use of the auditorium for large group presentations throughout the two day sessions which tends to de-personalize the experience and limit the meaningful engagement with peer leaders, faculty, and administrators.

Symptomatic of the current program's weakness is the fact that in many ways it appears to be something of an organizational stepchild. Leadership is fragmented and too often left to student leaders rather than being centered on a single professional manager. The faculty and other University staff seem to dismiss the program as a Student Affairs activity rather than seeing it as a high-priority academically oriented program. A related concern is the fact that the program is funded through a student fee – a phenomenon that results in resource allocation based on the limitations of a fee-based budget rather than on a judgment about the program's centrality to the University mission.

Considering our review of the program as it is currently constituted and our determination that a comprehensive change in focus is necessary, we concluded that the program should be re-invented from scratch rather than simply modified to accommodate some new elements.

3) PROPOSED PROGRAM STRUCTURE, SCOPE & STAFFING

Mastery of the thirteen developmental tasks we identified can best be achieved within the context of an Orientation experience that includes a yearlong perspective on delivering programs. The Orientation Program should be constructed along a timeline that includes the Discovery Days for admitted students, a traditional summer orientation, a "welcome to campus" program at the beginning of school, and a comprehensive First Year Experience extending across the freshman year.

Given the recommended comprehensive yearlong approach to Orientation, we concluded that the program should be supported by a full time position in Student Affairs that is dedicated to working closely with the colleges, the Enrollment Management Division and the faculty. The stages of the program that precede and follow the traditional summer program require a full-time focus of a director-level professional reporting directly to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. All of this warrants the establishment of a Department of New Student Experience (or a similar designation). This level of commitment will be required to ensure that the program achieves the necessary level of academic gravity that is essential to its success. Included in the responsibilities delegated to this department would be

the development and implementation of assessment activities so that we may effectively measure the level of success we achieve in fostering a successful transition for our students.

While the specific program details will be left to the implementation team and to the staff assigned to manage the Orientation Program, we did conclude that there are multiple delivery mechanisms that will be required for a successful program. Some of the developmental tasks we identified can best be achieved using approaches that have characterized UMass Dartmouth orientation programs in the past. These include large audience presentations and small group participatory sessions. However, there is clearly a need to broaden the range of the delivery mechanisms we utilize. In particular, we should explore the potential for developing web-based tools for students to use for mastering the skills they require for college success on their own timetables.

Finally, it is essential that we encourage campus-wide commitment to the Orientation program. Especially important is the active and enthusiastic participation of faculty. While there may be contractual and scheduling challenges associated with recruiting a broader base of participants, it is critical that we find incentives to prompt community-wide involvement in the program throughout the yearlong timeline we envision.

Appendix A – Task Force Membership

Member Name	Affiliation
Barber, Norman	Director of
Beckwith, Mary (Co-Chair)	Associate Dean of Students
Bruen, Tina	Director, International Student Center
Christian, Ellen	Director, Academic Advising
Currán-Kelly, Catherine	Faculty, Charlton College of Business
Dacey, Erin	Orientation Coordinator
Houser, Catherine	Faculty, English
Honeman, Don (Co-Chair)	Associate Vice Chancellor, Enrollment Management
Jacquart, Jamie	Director, SAIL
Laib, Chris	Assistant Director, SAIL
Laoulache, Ray	Faculty, Engineering (Impulse Program)
Maddocks, Bruce	Faculty/Director, Freshman Foundations, CVPA
Nunes, Jarred	Events Coordinator, CVPA
Parker, Juli	Director, Women's Resource Center
Peterson, Sonia	Faculty, Nursing
Watson, Angela	Assistant Director, OHRL

Appendix B – Task Force Meeting Schedule

The Orientation Task Force met on the following dates for 1.5-2 hours each meeting:

9/12/2007

9/21/2007

10/4/2007

10/11/2007

10/18/2007

11/1/2007

11/8/2007

11/15/2007

In addition, the task force sponsored and several members attended an audio conference on 11/6/2007 entitled "Orientation Plugged In: How to Create an Online Orientation Program"

Finally, two members of the task force attended the National Orientation Directors Association Conference in Dallas, TX, 10/27-30, 2007.

Appendix C – Admissions Presentation Summary

For our meeting on 10/11/2007, we invited Kelly Hayes from the Admissions Office to present information about both the Open House Programs and the Discovery Days Programs. Below is a summary of the presentation:

Open Houses

A recruitment program for high school students (mainly seniors but they are increasingly encouraging juniors to attend) and their families to encourage application. The Open Houses are specified by college and they are attended by 2500-3000 participants annually. The Open Houses are scheduled in October and November. The program includes presentations by:

Director of Admissions
Dean of the particular college
Staff from the Office of Housing and Residential Life
Staff from Financial Aid Office
Faculty Presentations by Major
Lunch

Discovery Days

Discovery Days programs are held from February-April each year for accepted students. They are more focused than Open Houses and 60-70% of those invited do attend. The four hour programs include information about:

Academic Advising
Orientation Dates and Information
Major Curriculum
Financial Aid/Individual sessions to review aid packages
Housing Application Process

Appendix D – Schroeder Presentation Summary – NODA Conference, October 2007

The closing keynote address at the National Orientation Directors Association Conference was delivered by Charles Schroeder, Senior Associate Consultant, Noel Levitz and was entitled: *Strategies for Increasing the Educational Effectiveness of Orientation and New Student Programs*. We have chosen to include a number of the slides from his presentation as the information he presented both affirmed and confirmed the direction of our task force work at its midpoint.

Schroeder, C. (2007, October). Strategies for increasing the educational effectiveness of orientation and new student programs.

Meeting our challenges: Dreaming ambitious dreams

- Proposition #1: Our mission is to design an undergraduate *experience* that is really empowering & transformational.
- Proposition #2: We must measure our success as educators on the basis of the *quality of encounters* we arrange.
- Proposition #3: If quality lies in the encounters we arrange, then we must ensure that these encounters are powerful, even *transformational* ones.

Noel-Levitz

Astin's Model

I	E	O
INPUT	ENVIRONMENT	OUTCOMES
Entering characteristics	<u>Full range of experiences</u>	Desired results

Noel-Levitz

Schroeder, C. (2007, October). Strategies for increasing the educational effectiveness of orientation and new student programs.

Opportunities: Enhance academic success by focusing on...

- The purpose of a college education
- Differences between high school and college, especially in terms of expectations, roles, responsibilities and "rigor"
- The vocational value of general education outcomes
- The "duties and obligations" one assumes when they join an academic community...student "job description".
- Treating college as a "40 hour work week"
- Understanding academic integrity and what constitutes plagiarism

Noel-Levitz

Additional suggestions for improving the undergraduate experience

1. Don't neglect sophomores and transfers
2. Improve handoffs ...school / college orientations
3. Become "barrier busters" ...champion elimination of barriers to student success (i.e. course scheduling / availability; dysfunctional business practices, etc.)
4. Create a campus service strategy (i.e. Service to our students will be fast, friendly, effective, simple and flexible)
5. Build inclusive communities by promoting humanitarian values---understanding, accepting and respecting differences

Noel-Levitz

Presented at the National Orientation Directors Association Annual Conference, Dallas, Tx.

Schroeder, C. (2007, October). Strategies for increasing the educational effectiveness of orientation and new student programs.

Additional suggestions

- 6 Create "core experiences" (i.e. learning communities, study groups, service ,active learning pedagogies) that complement the core curriculum and bring it to life
- 7 Engage in systematic assessment to evaluate your programs and demonstrate their efficacy by answering two questions...
 - Are we making a difference?
 - Are we making enough of a difference?
- 8 Most importantly, become institutional advocates and champions for transforming the student experience.

Noel-Levitz

Transforming our organizations: To create the future, challenge the past

- Organizational transformation starts with you and your willingness to:
 1. Challenge prevailing assumptions
 2. Look inward, not upward
 3. Push the boundaries of conventional wisdom
 4. Take reasonable risks

CARPE DIEM !

Noel-Levitz

Presented at the National Orientation Directors Association Annual Conference, Dallas, Tx.

Appendix E – Proposed Orientation Planning Committee Membership

Associate Dean of Students
Director, SAIL
Assistant Director, SAIL
Director, Women's Resource Center
Administrative Assistant, Student Affairs
Director, Academic Advising
Associate Director, OHRL
Administrator, First Year English Program
Director, Freshman Foundations, CVPA
Representative – Admissions
Representative – College Now
Representative – CITS
Director, New Student Transfer
Representative – Faculty Senate
Representative – Student Senate
Orientation Coordinator/Leader