

Towards a National Orientation Campaign: Good Practice for Universities in South Africa

FYE Conference, 2018

**SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE**



FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

Purpose of this workshop:

- Share feedback from last year's Orientation Summit
- Critically reflect on this feedback so as to be able to stretch our thinking about Orientation and re-imagine our (best) Orientation practices
- Chart a path for a national campaign about Orientation

Orientation Summit, 2017

- Mangosuthu University of Technology (2)
- University of Fort Hare (2)
- Durban University of Technology (4)
- University of Cape Town (1)
- Central University of Technology (1)
- Cape Peninsula University of Technology (1)
- Sol Plaatje University (1)
- University of Limpopo (2)
- University of the Western Cape (2)
- University of Stellenbosch (2)
- Walter Sisulu University (1)
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (1)
- Rhodes University (1)
- University of Johannesburg (1)
- University of the Witwatersrand (1)
- Vaal University of Technology (1)
- University of the Free State (1)
- University of Zululand (2)

27 delegates representing 18 universities

How long is Orientation?

- Typically, two weeks

(some variation across institutions as well as within institutions)

Is it campus-wide? Is it campus-specific?

- Typically, it is campus-wide and campus-specific (can also mean faculty-specific)
- Typically, there is Orientation for day students and an additional Orientation programme for students living in residence

Who takes ownership of Orientation?

- Department/Division of Student Affairs
- Student Counselling Services
- Student Councils in faculties
- Respective faculties
- Residence Life

What, of your Orientation, works particularly well?

- Senior students (peer helpers, peer counsellors, peer buddies, mentors) – their energy and commitment
- Giving students freebies
- Marketing of student support services
- Preparing a snack since students are there the whole day
- Getting sponsorship for various events
- The depth of Orientation in the residences

What is the purpose of Orientation?

- “An intentional strategy aimed at reducing attrition.”
- “To make transition easier.”
- “It is one of the essential building-blocks of the first year experience.”
- “Introducing students to the academic and social culture of the institution and to create a sense of belonging for the new students.”
- “Promote social integration.”
- “To induct students and help them create networks that would enable persistence.”
- “Institutions benefit from Orientation as it allows both students and staff to engage critically with each other.”

What is the purpose of Orientation? (continued)

- “Orientation ensures that students register.”
- “To develop some conceptual tools to navigate this complex environment.”
- “An exciting opportunity for first years to see what the institution has to offer and to critically engage with practices of the institutional cultures.”
- “Orientation serves as a platform for different aspects of stakeholders within the institution to integrate with a common purpose.”

What are particular challenges?

- Information overload
- Presenters grappling for time in the programme
- Presentations are too serious
- Student attendance
- Communication with respective cohorts of students
- Incorrect information given to students who are making career-defining decisions

Recommendations for best practice:

- “Having a ceremony by the Vice-Chancellor or Deans of faculties where students are welcomed to the institution and given gift packs of some sort.”
- “Orientation programme should have a goal and an outcome. Activities should be in the programme in order to assist students in their adaption.”
- “Programmes should cater for both residence and commuting students.”
- Introduce students to spaces within and outside campus like where the town is, type of transport, and so on...”

Recommendations for best practice: (continued)

- “Having academically and institutionally informed seniors who know the campus involved with Orientation.”
- “Have vibrant, fun, and welcoming student leadership.”
- “Recruit a mentor system who will walk with first years the entire year. As problems arise, mentors will be there to assist.”
- “Be mindful of students with disabilities – they must be included in Orientation.”
- “Perhaps look at registration first and then Orientation.”
- “Involve the library more.”

Purpose of this workshop:

- Critically reflect on this feedback so as to be able to stretch our thinking about Orientation and re-imagine our (best) Orientation practices

(in general terms – not to say that some of this is not already happening, but it needs to be forefronted more).

Pause, Suspend, and Stretch!

What is the definition of orientation?

“A basic definition of the noun orientation refers to the act or process of orienting or being oriented in relation to the points of the compass or other specific directions.”

(Collins Reference Dictionary, 2017)

What is the purpose of Orientation?

- “An intentional strategy aimed at reducing attrition.”
- “To make transition easier.”
- “It is one of the essential building-blocks of the first year experience.”
- “Introducing students to the academic and social culture of the institution and to create a sense of belonging for the new students.”
- “Promote social integration.”
- “To induct students and help them create networks that would enable persistence.”
- “Institutions benefit from Orientation as it allows both students and staff to engage critically with each other.”

What is the purpose of Orientation? (continued)

- “Orientation ensures that students register.”
- “To develop some conceptual tools to navigate this complex environment.”
- “An exciting opportunity for first years to see what the institution has to offer and to critically engage with practices of the institutional cultures.”
- “Orientation serves as a platform for different aspects of stakeholders within the institution to integrate with a common purpose.”

A year-long musing:

There is no aspect of the first year (and arguably beyond) that a student spends at university that is not touched on by Orientation

...and yet Orientation is, for the most part, ten days.

Stretch 1: “Transition takes longer than two weeks”

Orientation needs to be thought of and practiced as a process...

Two weeks at the start of the year (when students are the most disoriented) is not sufficient.

Orientation cannot start on the first day students set foot onto campus; it has to start before then and extend beyond the traditional two week period.

Stretch 2: “Student learning and success”

There is a missing unifier: a grounding in student learning and ultimately student success

Any purpose of Orientation needs to be grounded in student learning for, ultimately, student success.

Stretch 3: Orientation as Backward Design

Principles of good course design promote alignment among course goals, learning objectives (learning outcomes) and types of assessment used to evaluate student learning AND that this alignment must be explained to and made clear to students such that they have a roadmap of the course they are taking.

Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (1995) promote Backward Design

TRANSITION TO UCT
 The transition to UCT has academic, social, and emotional elements. Asking for help is a natural part of this transition, and key to your success. What you do in, and outside of the classroom will create *your* first year experience.

Navigating the environment & accessing services

Managing academics, record & funding

Joining this community, and making it your own

PILLARS

- Know the layout of UCT campuses
- Know how to get around – transport
- Know how to keep safe
- Know how to find services or where to look

- Know the structure of your degree
- Know key admin and funding deadlines
- Know the basic skills your courses require
- Know how to manage your transcript

- Know that you belong to the UCT community
- Know that you have a voice in this community
- Know that equality, respect and diversity are valued
- Know that the experience you bring matters

GOALS

Access the Jammie Shuttle route maps and timetable
 Be able to successfully use the Jammie shuttle
 Safely travel to and from your residence or off-campus accommodation
 Be informed about the various safety practices and emergency numbers
 Find the venues for your classes
 Be able to locate the different CPS stations
 Be able to find your way around Cape Town safely
 Use Student Wellness for your physical and emotional health.
 Be informed about key platforms to find help – UCT Mobile, timelines etc.

Be able to construct your curriculum
 Be able to access and navigate PeopleSoft to manage your record.
 Plot key deadlines (related academics or funding) that you need to remember
 Locate and use academic support in your faculty or residence
 Be able to successfully use the library services
 Be able to use VULA, email, and access Eduroam
 Use opportunities to develop key skills you will need (Excel, MS Word)

Use the university support (such as DISCHO) if you experience or witness discrimination or harassment be it based, on sexual orientation, sexual practices, gender performance, culture, religion etc.
 Identify and join various groups and societies.
 Engage with your class rep, your faculty council and the SRC as avenues to represent your interests
 Form part of your residence community, and make your voice heard through your residence committees
 Connect with fellow students (mentors, OLs) who can offer good advice.
 Find opportunities to be of service to the larger community

OBJECTIVES

Orientation as a well-designed course:

- Can address the information overload
- Can address student attendance
- Can address the timing of content
- Can address the duration of Orientation (help make the case for longer durations of Orientation)

Good practices for Orientation in South Africa

- *Institutional and national narrative about student learning and success*
 - The purpose, scope, and duration of institutional Orientation programs must both be informed by and contribute to an institutional narrative about student learning and student success.
 - This needs to be scaled up – institutions' Orientation programs must both be informed by and contribute to a national narrative about student learning and student success.
 - A deliberate framing away from the deficit model.

Good practices for Orientation in South Africa

- *An intentional design to the offerings of Orientation*
 - Orientation cannot be stand-alone, haphazard or ill-conceived. It must be intentionally designed to align with, support, and reinforce key goals and objectives for the overall first year experience

Good practices for Orientation in South Africa

- *There needs to be a total campus commitment*

“The best orientation experience occurs when there is total campus commitment to the process, resulting from the collaborative efforts of students, senior administrators, faculty, and the broad spectrum of Student Affairs and educational support programmers” (Smith & Brackin, 1993:35).

Good practices for Orientation in South Africa

- *Orientation begins before Orientation*
- *Orientation continues after Orientation*

Good practices for Orientation in South Africa

- *Orientation is not just for students, but for parents, too*
 - We need to fully acknowledge and support the family transition
 - We need to give parents information and tools to support support student learning and success

Good practices for Orientation in South Africa

- *Feedback from students is key to the evolution of Orientation*
 - Collecting feedback from students which, ideally, should be fed back to the relevant stakeholders AND to students

Purpose of this workshop:

- Chart a path for a national campaign about Orientation

Towards a national campaign for Orientation:

- What should the goal(s) of a national campaign for Orientation be?
- What could a national campaign do for Orientation that universities alone cannot?
- What could a national campaign do for the public that universities alone cannot?
- What are essential components of a national campaign?
- What could be effective channels of communication for a national campaign?
- How do we inspire our purpose in a single phrase for the national campaign?