Orientation Planning Guide: Graduate and Professional Students

A successful orientation program establishes a welcoming and supportive departmental culture for students, and provides them with the information, tools, contacts, and confidence to thrive academically, professionally, and personally. Orientation can begin prior to your students’ arrival on campus, and continue as they move through each stage of their academic careers.

Orientation provides students with the opportunity to:
- Establish connections with departmental faculty, staff, and students.
- Learn about program requirements and unofficial expectations/cultural nuances of the department.
- Identify departmental, collegiate, and university support services, as well as informal avenues for assistance.
- Ask questions and/or express concerns.
- Small group discussions, to share information about how graduate/professional students fit into the academic culture, and about their new role(s).
- Recognition of your students’ diversity of cultures, values, and experiences, and how this diversity may, for example, inform their sense of belonging in an academic environment, and how they best interact with faculty, staff, and other students.
- Ongoing formal and informal opportunities for peer and faculty interactions, throughout the students’ first and subsequent years, that address their ongoing needs. Sessions for more advanced students might focus on research methods, thesis/dissertation writing, funding, and career options.

Planning Your Orientation Program:
- Ensure that your department’s expectations for satisfactory degree progress are clearly articulated and easily available to your students.
- Empower your current students in the planning process. Consider asking the following questions:
  - How would you describe a successful orientation experience?
  - What information was most crucial for you to know upon entering the program in order to thrive during your first year?
  - What is the most effective orientation format for sharing that information with students?
- Consider incorporating one or more of the following best practice elements into your orientation:
  - Peer mentoring, which provides structured opportunities for experienced graduate/professional students to meet with and assist new students.

Resources

Student Conflict Resolution Center
www.sos.umn.edu
612.626.0689, 254 Appleby Hall
Contact: Jan Morse

Boynnton Mental Health
www.boynnton.umn.edu
612.624.1444, 410 Church St SE
Contact: Matt Hanson

Graduate School
www.grad.umn.edu
612.625.2815, 321 Johnston Hall
Contact: Karen Starry