

Anatomy of an Orientation Welcome

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The Orientation Welcome is a critical component of the many methods that introduce students to the college campus. Ironically, however, many administrators overlook the strategic importance of this brief message. It has been our observation that today's students often attend two or three orientation sessions as they make their final decisions regarding their educational pursuits. Therefore, it is critical that the president, vice president, deans, and directors, who are welcoming prospective students, set a positive tone for the day while assuring the students and families that they have made a great decision in selecting this particular institution. By pointing out the strengths of your institution's academic and extracurricular opportunities, you can arouse a level of excitement in the student and an understanding about the quality of the student's experience in the family. This will also build confidence in the many support services available at your institution to assure students' success from Orientation to Graduation.

There are some essential components to consider in crafting an Orientation Welcome:

- Be concise and brief, no more than 4 or 5 minutes.
- Be warm and welcoming in your opening statements. Inform the students and families that a great deal of time and energy has gone into preparing for this day. Don't forget to acknowledge the hard work of the orientation staff!
- Actively involve students and family members. It is not wise to call on participants specifically, but get them up on their feet by asking about their majors, future goals, hometowns. Begin to create a sense of campus community by having them introduce themselves to people seated next to them.
- Assuage students' anxiety about such questions as, "Can I make it here?"; "How will I find a major that's right for me?" Assure them that challenge can be exciting, but highlight successful strategies such as enrolling in a First-Year Experience class or becoming involved in a campus organization as a means of becoming engaged (Clark, 2005).
- Counsel parents to have faith in the great job they have already done in preparing their children to be adults. These young adults will surely continue to change and mature in a nurturing atmosphere of caring, competent staff, and immense institutional resources.
- Acknowledge that family members are very important partners with the institution in the success of the student.
- Let parents know that advice is available for their financial questions.
- Praise the institution, but keep the focus on the student and family.

In drawing your welcome to a close, employ a motivational quote as an effective way of inspiring your students to persevere as they face challenges during their college

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experience. For example:

The path to a dream is paved with sacrifices and lined with determination.

Although it has many stumbling blocks along the way and may go in more than one direction, it is traveled by belief in you and others but requires courage, persistence, and hard work. It is conquered with a willingness to face challenges and take chances, to fail and try again and again. Along the way, you may have to confront doubts, setbacks, and unfairness. But when the path comes to an end, you will find that there is no greater joy than making your dream come true (adapted from Cage, 2001).

Your audience will hear many people speak during the day or two of Orientation. They will be overwhelmed with forms, pamphlets, and handouts. They will be tired from trekking to advising sessions, purchasing books, waiting in line, and touring campus in all kinds of weather. They will be outside of their comfort zones with a long ride at the beginning and again at the end of the day. So, keep your presentation simple, with a common theme and a couple of main ideas. Avoid jargon or campus-specific references; and establish trustworthiness and a sense of community among the participants (Henrichs, 2004). Treat your audience as if they have already made their final decision and this is their first day as future alumni and members of your campus community. This initial impression of genuine welcome is the key to forging the first strong bonds of collegial success!

References

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