Graduate Student Orientation: A National Survey of Practices

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This study surveyed representatives from 33 institutions with graduate programs to highlight the landscape of interventions typically offered to orient students at the graduate level. The findings indicate that graduate student orientation programs (GSOP) often address campus logistics and interpersonal belonging while less frequently focusing on programming for institutional belonging, academic acculturation, or adjustment for students' supporters—common areas of focus for undergraduate orientation. Another important finding was that student affairs administrators and those who would primarily identify as undergraduate orientation professionals (or graduate orientation professionals) were not involved in GSOP. Implications for practice are presented. Keywords: graduate students, new student transition, graduate student orientation

Orientation within a collegiate context is a programmatic effort by the institution to aid in the transition and success of entering students (Poock, 2006; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). Orientation programs can differ in structure, content, and duration depending on the targeted student population (Poock, 2006; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). In contrast to orientation for undergraduate students, graduate student orientation programming (GSOP) is often defined by academic and cocurricular programmatic efforts that address key transitional aspects pertinent to entering graduate students (Poock, 2006). GSOP provides a comprehensive space for new graduate students to acquire the social and navigational capital of their new institution (Hesli et al., 2003; Poock, 2006). This capital acquisition ideally occurs throughout a series of programs curated by a central administrative entity (e.g., Office of the Graduate School) focused on sharing campus resources and information, fostering social connection, addressing the needs of marginalized populations, and

amplifying student voices (Poock, 2006). Dilks (2021) interviewed 16 graduate students and 10 members of the faculty or administration as part of an action research study on how best to support graduate student success. These interviews noted some of the ways graduate students came into contact with support services, yet the outcomes most emphasized were very personal, such as confidence, safety, and belonging. The findings included a characterization of orientation as being primarily informational, while Dilks emphasized that social support influenced students' sense of efficacy, which went well beyond simple sharing of information. Grounded in the context of socialization, GSOP initiates a process of dual enculturation into students' individual academic sphere and the broader institutional community (Poock, 2006). GSOP is easily thought of as characterizing a deeper focus on developing students into academics and researchers (e.g., Lightman, 2015), while orientation at the undergraduate level can be seen as introducing job preparation or career exploration more broadly. Despite the more academic emphasis, GSOP can address the cocurricular, intersectional needs of the various graduate student demographics through multiple facets of programming (Poock, 2006; Rapp & Golde, 2008). In this study, researchers compiled a framework (Table 1) of categorical outcomes informing orientation programming and used this model to survey graduate orientation programs nationally and report on current trends. Suggestions on how GSOP can be improved upon to better meet the unique needs of students transitioning to graduate school are also presented.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Table 1. *Reported Frequencies of Graduate Student Orientation Outcomes and Practices*

Graduate student orientation practice by outcome	Frequency of GSOP
Campus logistics outcome	33
Campus tour	15
Resource fair	13
Resource info sessions	29
Policy sessions	16
Logistics (forms, ID card, registration, parking)	15
Online module	12
Interpersonal belonging outcome	33
DEI sessions	8
Affinity groups	5
Virtual discussion boards or social media pages	5
Meals provided	20
Social events	20
Panel of students	12
Graduate student association (GSA)	14

Table 1. *Reported Frequencies of Graduate Student Orientation Outcomes and Practices (continued)*

Graduate student orientation practice by outcome	Frequency of GSOP
Institutional belonging outcome	27
Welcome message from administration	21
Scavenger hunt	3
Swag	8
Raffle	2
Mascot	1
Traditions or campus history	9
Formal photograph	1
Alumni involvement	3
Academic acculturation outcome	23
Academic expectations	16
Working with advisors	10
Academic resources	7
Academic integrity	10
Professional development	9
Adjustment for supporters outcome	18
Virtual discussion boards or social media pages	3
Open invitation to attend	14
Students with dependents programming	7
Welcome event for families	4
Resources for supporters	5
Concurrent programming for supporters	3

Key Outcomes Of Graduate Orientation

Graduate orientation programming is rarely addressed in part because perceived developmental needs tend to underlie traditional undergraduate orientation practices, while graduate students are considered to have already adjusted to the college milieu (Pontius & Harper, 2006). Incoming graduate students experience similar fears and anxieties to undergraduate students during their transition to university (Poock, 2002), even when matriculating to an institution where they studied previously. Orientation programs alleviate this anxiety (Hullinger & Hogan, 2014) and are a top factor of enculturation for graduate students (Boyle & Boice, 1998). As described by Rentz (1996) and Upcraft and Farnsworth (1984), orientation programming should assist students in academic and personal adjustment while facilitating their families' understanding of the collegiate experience and gathering data about entering students. Expanding on foundational work and taking newer literature into account,

we posit five outcomes that are central to graduate orientation practices: (a) campus logistics and navigation of systems, (b) interpersonal belonging, (c) institutional belonging, (d) academic acculturation, and (e) adjustment for supporters.

CAMPUS LOGISTICS AND NAVIGATION OF SYSTEMS

One of the key intentions behind collegiate orientation is to provide information to entering students regarding campus logistics and navigation of systems within the physical and virtual campus environments (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Miller & Viajar, 2001; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). As students may need to access and navigate campus systems prior to attending their campus-wide or departmental orientation, certain institutions initiate this aspect of orientation directly following admissions through transition communications, including pre-orientation checklists, admissions newsletters, and online discussion forums (Miller & Viajar, 2001; Taub & Komives, 1998). Orienting students to campus logistics and navigation of systems from the onset of admission is key in ensuring matriculation (Taub & Komives, 1998).

This navigational information, or capital, is provided through a series of targeted communications and sessions within graduate student orientation programs. These include presentations and tutorials on navigating campus technology, such as the online student portal, course registration systems, financial payment systems, and campus technological support services (Miller & Viajar, 2001). Providing navigational information on the physical campus infrastructure, such as academic and student support services, is often relayed to students through presentations and campus tours (Miller & Viajar, 2001).

Witkowsky (2012) explored 12 white-identified doctoral students' constructed experiences of wellness at a large western university, which included students' own perceptions of how they were impacted by external factors. The responses characterized the environment as its own culture, requiring a great deal of information and skill, such as time management and knowledge of procedures. The volume of doctoral students' informational needs, logistics, and commitments were experienced as stress. The findings illustrated the institutional need to focus not only on undergraduate students' needs but also on the unique experiences of graduate students as well.

INTERPERSONAL BELONGINGNESS

The concept of belongingness has emerged as a key analytical lens for examining college student development, success, and retention (Strayhorn, 2018). Within a higher education context, belonging with peers both within the classroom and in the broader campus community is a vital dimension for college success (O'Meara et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2018). Interpersonal belonging is a key outcome of collegiate orientation programming.

Interpersonal belonging takes on heightened importance in the context of graduate orientation, as many graduate students experience isolation within their specific academic discipline (Brandes, 2006; Pontius & Harper, 2006). Common practices to address this outcome include ongoing programmatic efforts such as graduate student mentorship programs or buddy systems and graduate student associations (Coulter et al., 2014; Ribera et al., 2017; Taub & Komives, 1998). These practices are intended to cultivate interpersonal belonging at an interdisciplinary level among the broader graduate student community. Similarly, certain institutions have created physical space on campus for graduate students in the form of graduate student centers and lounges (Brandes, 2006; Soleil, 2008). Brandes (2006) asserts that these dedicated physical spaces initiate community building and interpersonal belonging for graduate and professional students from different departments and academic programs.

An emerging trend within the graduate education sphere is the implementation of student cohorts during orientation sessions and throughout the first year. An action research intervention (Dilks, 2021) was undertaken to broaden graduate students' orientation experiences beyond what was described as a traditional model featuring meetings with faculty and other students toward one focused on building relationships. Dilks (2021) found that earlier orientation engagement focused on social connections made those connections salient in the participants' minds as increasing confidence, reducing feelings of depression and isolation, and providing a support system.

Rapp and Golde (2008) emphasized the impact of intersectionality on the individual graduate student experience. The institutional challenges and societal barriers graduate students may face are inextricably tied to the intersection of their social locations, such as age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, ability, and other individual characteristics (Simpson, 2008). Graduate orientation programming must be grounded in an understanding of intersecting systems of privilege and oppression to support the needs of historically marginalized student populations (Poock, 2008). A more recent study of seven international graduate students' experiences in making these connections found that making department-level connections helped not only with acculturating academically but also with overall belonging (Rodriguez et al., 2019). To truly cultivate interpersonal belongingness, it is imperative that graduate orientation programs create space for marginalized students to engage with one another and share perspectives (Simpson, 2008).

INSTITUTIONAL BELONGINGNESS
Campus climate and environment influence students' experience of belongingness to their institution and their satisfaction with their experience (Kuh, 1993). Belongingness is closely tied to students' experiences with non-peers in the campus

community, including faculty, staff, and administrators (Strayhorn, 2018). This outcome is particularly important for students historically marginalized on college campuses and within higher education systems (Strayhorn, 2018) and international students (Ramrakhiani et al., 2021).

Orientation programs implement a variety of practices to foster institutional belongingness in new students. The primary way this population builds a connection to their university during orientation is by meeting key administrators and faculty members. A welcome week structure used to integrate undergraduate honors students into the institution provides an overview of practices that foster institutional belonging (Pouchak et al., 2008). These practices included small-group discussions with an interdisciplinary panel of faculty members, social events with administrators and faculty, and an induction event with welcome addresses from campus administrators (Pouchak et al., 2008). In a survey of entering undergraduates, conducting research with faculty during the first year was positively correlated with a strong sense of institutional acceptance (Ribera et al., 2017). While these studies were focused on the undergraduate orientation experience, the findings can be applied to the graduate student population. Though graduate students have experience being in a university environment, they require adequate orientation to their new institution to feel acceptance and belonging.

ACADEMIC ACCULTURATION
Graduate students experience a dual socialization process as they enter both graduate-level studies and an academic discipline (Golde, 1998; Tinto, 1993; Weidman et al., 2001). Orientation is a key part of this socialization process and is necessary to graduate students' transition. Orientation practices to begin the academic acculturation process can include individual meetings with faculty advisors, discussions on academic integrity, and orientation to the field of study. The role of a faculty advisor may be new to students and necessitates discussion during orientation. Graduate students have indicated that meeting with their faculty advisor prior to the beginning of classes was valuable in preparing for their academic and professional responsibilities (Taub & Komives, 1998). Academic librarian Harriet Lightman (2015) shared programming focused on acculturating graduate students to the resources and practices of research, which included opportunities for students to interact with peers, faculty, and administrators.

Students vary in their understanding of academic integrity practices and the expectations specific to their institution. Acculturation to academic integrity policies is particularly important for graduate students, who may engage with them more often than undergraduates. International graduate students report that covering this material during orientation has helped them navigate American standards for integrity and

ease their transition to graduate school (Jian et al., 2018). Socializing graduate students into their academic disciplines requires an ongoing series of coordinated professional and personal development opportunities. Academic departments often need to handle this independently to address the specificities of each academic discipline, and their practices can vary. One program with a large quantitative component hosts an introduction to the computing equipment and statistical software (Davis et al., 2001); medically based programs host clinical orientations (Rush et al., 2019). At a departmental level, faculty and staff take on a vital role in introducing students to the campus climate and professional space of the department (Poock, 2006).

ADJUSTMENT FOR SUPPORTERS

Family members and loved ones often make significant adjustments to support graduate students' success (Sakamoto, 2006). Undergraduate orientation programs often build concurrent programming for students' supporters to orient them to what their students will be experiencing (Ward-Roof et al., 2008). Graduate students benefit from similar supports and often require more assistance balancing family and graduate life (Springer et al., 2009).

Spouses of graduate students experience a variety of stressors, including loss of status, power imbalance in the relationship, and feelings of inadequacy. They can benefit from culturally sensitive marriage enrichment programs introduced during orientation. Survey results indicate that orientation practices to support this population could also include creating spaces for graduate student spouses to meet and build community (Myers-Walls et al., 2010). Graduate students are also more likely than undergraduates to have a child or be raising a family during their studies (Hoffer et al., 2006). Orientation practices that serve this population include professional development tailored to the circumstances of graduate student parents, social activities where graduate students' children are encouraged to attend, and family-friendly spaces, such as lactation rooms (Springer et al., 2009).

Methods

Researchers designed and conducted a structured qualitative survey to ascertain higher education institutions' graduate orientation practices guided by two questions:

1. What practices do graduate orientation programs currently implement to address the student success variables of campus logistics, interpersonal belonging, institutional belonging, academic acculturation, and adjustment for supporters?
2. What are the other characteristics of the graduate orientation programs (institutional characteristics, structure, and implementation of orientation)?

Because the researchers set out to identify how GSOP fits into well-established undergraduate orientation categories, they chose to employ a very simple a priori qualitative method for this project, which meant the codes would be predetermined (Stemler, 2001). A priori coding allowed the researchers to focus less on respondents' words and more on the broadly defined functions of the orientation programs and where each function fits into the pre-existing taxonomy (Creswell, 2013). While professionals may turn over frequently, this study sought to capture the existence of communicated institutional practices, which meet general criteria rather than individual viewpoints and experiences.

Researchers developed a categorical template for organizing respondent answers (Stemler, 2001) using existing literature on undergraduate and graduate student needs related to orientation and transition to a new college or university setting: campus logistics and navigation of systems, interpersonal belongingness, institutional belongingness, academic acculturation, and adjustment for supporters. This template was used to conduct a priori content analysis (Creswell, 2013) in which institutional practices were interpreted as fitting into given categories.

In the first phase, researchers visited university websites and gathered preliminary data on how graduate programs oriented new graduate students. For a nationally representative sample, a total of 135 institutions across each U.S. Census region (West, Midwest, Northeast, South) identified as offering graduate orientation programming were contacted. Where possible, the selection of orientation programs included small, medium, and large institution sizes as defined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2019). Researchers further classified the selected graduate orientation institutions based on (a) their region, (b) the division offering graduate orientation, (c) the length or nature of the graduate orientation intervention, (d) the components and respective objectives of the graduate orientation program, (e) institution size, (f) population of graduate students, (g) any other information that characterized the graduate orientation program, and (h) any other contacts researchers should speak with at their university.

For the second phase, researchers gathered participant contact information from each institution's webpage covering GSOP information and registration, often the Office of the Graduate School or Graduate Education departmental webpage. Next, researchers contacted participants via phone or email depending on the contact information included on the departmental webpage. The research team contacted the majority of participants via email to schedule a synchronous oral survey conducted via phone or a cloud-based video communication application, such as Zoom. Of the 135 institutions contacted by phone or email, 33 agreed to participate in oral data collection. This

study gathered information about higher education institutions from institution personnel but not information about institution personnel or their views. Participants were asked to consent verbally via a consent/assent script. Participants' institutions were labeled by their general descriptors, such as size and geographic region, only for the purposes of the data analysis and its eventual dissemination.

The interviewers asked each participant if they had knowledge of what was done in graduate orientation at their institutions and the focus of specific initiatives. In some instances, probing, open-ended questions were used to ask the person to expand further on what graduate student outcomes could be met through a given programmatic component. For example, if a respondent stated that their graduate students go to an information session, a follow-up question might be, "what is covered in the information session," . . . "who leads the information session," or "what are some examples of the activities during this session?"

PARTICIPANTS

During three contact phases, researchers contacted 135 institutions (West: 36, Midwest: 32, Northeast: 32, South: 35). A total of 33 GSOP coordinators or related professional staff members, representing eight institutions in the West, eight in the Midwest, eight in the South, and nine in the Northeast, participated in structured oral surveys from January 2020 to June 2020 until saturation. The survey sample was representative across institution size, with 16 large institutions, 10 medium institutions, and seven small institutions. Per Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2019), 13 institutions were R1: Doctoral Universities – Very High Research Activity, eight were R2: Doctoral Universities – High Research Activity, and two were Doctoral/Professional Universities. Of the 10 non-doctoral institutions surveyed, four were M1: Master's Universities – Larger Programs, two were M2: Master's Universities – Medium Programs, three were Special Focus Institutions, and one was a Baccalaureate College. Six participants represented institutions classified as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) as defined by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (2018-2019). Included among the original sample were 14 institutions classified as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs; US Department of Education, 2020). None of these institutions participated in the study.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The researchers were two master's degree students and a professor at a large public comprehensive master's degree-granting university with high research activity in the Western US. The professor and one graduate student identified as white, cis male, while the other graduate student identified as Asian cis female. The students and professor were part of a graduate program in higher education/student affairs.

The graduate student researchers were also engaged as graduate assistants in administering a graduate orientation program.

Findings and Discussion

A total of 32 practices were collected and categorized into outcome areas (Table 1). Some of the outcomes yielded greater depth as they were discussed with participating institutions through variations on how these outcomes were enacted, who was implementing them, or their implied novelty. In these cases, the researchers conferred with one another for agreement on the need to further explain and categorize these interventions within the outcomes list of campus logistics and navigation, interpersonal belonging, institutional belonging, academic acculturation, and adjustment for supporters.

Overall, it was found that no institution was relying on undergraduate orientation professionals or personnel who identify as orientation professionals to implement GSOP, despite the similarity between undergraduate and graduate student needs and the potential for efficiency in scheduling and logistics. GSOP personnel tended to have academic affairs identities, such as advising, faculty, and administration, and orientation was just a small part of their job rather than their primary specialty. Approximately half of the institution-wide graduate orientation programs did not have communication with department- or program-specific graduate orientations. No notable differences stood out in GSOP among HSIs, nor between HSIs and non-HSIs.

CAMPUS LOGISTICS AND NAVIGATION OF SYSTEMS

New student orientation programs are a vital mechanism for setting institutional expectations to assist entering students along their navigational transition to the holistic collegiate environment (Miller & Viajar, 2001). An essential component of this is disseminating information about campus services during GSOP and providing students with the social capital needed to access and navigate said services and resources (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Pontius & Harper, 2006; Miller & Viajar, 2001). In connection, research literature within this outcome area touches upon the importance of integrating technological campus systems into new student orientation programs (Miller & Viajar, 2001).

All 33 institutions surveyed met this outcome area with select GSOP programmatic interventions and practices (see Table 1). The research team found two common interventions for the areas of campus logistics and navigation of systems: (a) sharing resources and (b) virtual delivery.

Sharing Resources

One prevalent intervention that emerged from the data within the outcome category of campus logistics and navigation of systems was the concept of sharing resources, which is embodied by common practices such as resource fairs and information sessions focused on student services, academic services, and information technology services, among others. Many institutions created space to orient incoming graduate students to the online campus infrastructure (e.g., online student portal, course registration interface, financial payment system) within this outcome area. Miller and Viajar (2001) asserted that an online session on how to navigate university services is a vital component of GSOP. In addition, an embedded discussion of developing technological competency and expertise during GSOP is integral to a positive transition within the outcome area of campus logistics and navigation of systems (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Miller & Viajar, 2001).

Virtual Delivery

Very few institutions discussed the topic of virtual delivery in relation to their GSOP efforts within the campus logistics and navigation of systems outcome area prior to March 2020. Due to COVID-19, select institutions shifted their orientation programmatic efforts to a virtual delivery interface, such as Canvas for asynchronous content and Zoom/WebEx for synchronous orientation sessions. Participants included online modules in relation to the campus logistics and navigation of systems outcome. Student success and retention are prominent areas of focus for student affairs staff, faculty, and administration. Courses delivered virtually have a 20% lower retention rate than traditional face-to-face courses (Ali & Leeds, 2009). In addition, Ali and Leeds (2009) assert a positive correlation between attending a face-to-face orientation session and graduate student retention. As more programs moved online during and following COVID-19, virtual synchronous orientation sessions and events are key in student retention and fostering interpersonal belonging among entering graduate students.

INTERPERSONAL BELONGING

Through a student development lens, a sense of belongingness with colleagues within the confines of the classroom and broader campus community is essential for student retention and satisfaction in college (O'Meara et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2018). Many graduate students experience what is often referred to as the silo effect, in which they become isolated in their specific academic building and department, experiencing minimal interaction with individuals outside their academic microsystems (Brandes, 2006; Pontius & Harper, 2006). As a result, GSOP aims to initiate and cultivate spaces where entering graduate students can build interpersonal networks at an interdisciplinary level.

All 33 institutions surveyed met this outcome area with varying orientation interventions and sessions (see Table 1). The research team found two main intervention areas: (a) social events and mixers and (b) providing meals. Graduate student association events and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programming/ training were also common.

Social Events and Mixers
The most common way institutions fostered interpersonal belonging during GSOP was through a series of social events and mixers. Certain institutions hosted graduate student panels, which created a platform for current students to discuss their own individualized experiences and address questions and concerns from incoming students. Select institutions hosted meals, happy hours, and social mixers during GSOP, some of which were sponsored by the campus' graduate student organization, often named the Graduate Student Association (GSA).

GSA Participation and Involvement
GSA participation and involvement in orientation emerged due in part to the prevalence of this practice within the main outcome category of social events and mixers. As mentioned above, the GSA hosted many social events and mixers during GSOP. One institution's GSA hosted its inaugural weekly social event at their campus' graduate student lounge on the evening of the main graduate orientation day. Directly connected to fostering interpersonal connection and belonging at an interdisciplinary level is GSA involvement and participation in GSOP.

Provided Meals
A majority of the institutions surveyed provided a meal during orientation programming. In addition, these select institutions connected shared meals with fostering interpersonal belonging by creating a space for students to engage with individuals from other academic disciplines and departments. Some institutions embedded social programming during the meals, such as icebreakers and conversation starters.

DEI Programming/Training
Very few schools included DEI programming or training, but those that did indicated their intent to build interpersonal belonging in the graduate community. Similarly, very few schools included affinity spaces, but those that did indicated their intent to use these to foster interpersonal belonging for affinity groups.

INSTITUTIONAL BELONGING
Orientation programming can be a key factor in building institutional belongingness in new students. Building close relationships with faculty and other administrators is

the primary way orientation programs introduce students to the institution (Ribera et al., 2017). Intentional connections with faculty and staff have been found to predict GPA among first-generation college students (Almeida et al., 2019). Other high-impact practices can foster students' sense of place, particularly for students historically marginalized on college campuses and within higher education systems (Holton, 2015). Graduate students benefit from intentional programming introducing them to their new institutional environment.

Welcome Messages

The most common way, found at 21 institutions, for fostering institutional belonging during orientation was through a welcome address from key members of campus administration. This could be one address from the university president or a series of addresses from a combination of deans and department chairs. Some orientation programs coordinated roundtable discussion sessions with university administrators, allowing students to connect on a more personal level.

Connections with faculty are positively associated with a strong sense of institutional acceptance (Ribera et al., 2017). Students benefit from being introduced to key members of campus administration earlier on and fostering these relationships over time. Opportunities to connect on a more personal level during orientation are more effective interventions, while keynote speeches are a more efficient way to introduce new graduate students to campus leadership.

Sense of Place

Sense of place can be understood as the emotional bond an individual or group forms to a setting (Masterson et al., 2017). It is also related to the symbols and feelings individuals associate with a particular setting (Datel & Dingemans, 1984). Sense of place is related to positive stewardship of a place (Chapin & Knapp, 2015) and individual well-being (Breslow et al., 2016). Establishing sense of place is important to college students' transition and identity development (Holton, 2015).

A select group of nine institutions built a sense of place among incoming students with intentionality and purpose. One institution formally photographs each new graduate student next to a campus landmark and sends the photo to the student as a memento. Some schools focus on long-standing traditions by sharing stories about campus history and student rituals.

Student Showcases

Only two institutions used orientation as an opportunity to showcase the work and accomplishments of continuing students. One institution hosted a variety show with performances from art and theater graduate students. Another institution hosted a

research symposium where continuing graduate students shared their work with new graduate students.

Showcasing the work of continuing graduate students contributes to a sense of institutional belonging by including new students in the scholarship and creative output of the institution. Such events also begin the process of acculturation to their new identity as practitioners in their field. Showcases are also an effective way to include continuing students in the process of welcoming and orienting new students to the institution.

ACADEMIC ACCULTURATION

Graduate students undergo a dual socialization process to graduate-level education and their academic discipline (Golde, 1998; Tinto, 1993; Weidman et al., 2001). GSOP is the beginning of both parts of this socialization process. Academic acculturation can often be addressed more effectively on a departmental level (Davis et al., 2001; Rush et al., 2019; Poock, 2006). Incoming graduate students can enter with a wide variety of prior educational experiences, and it can be worthwhile to host institution-wide programming to acculturate students to graduate study.

Rigor

Sixteen institutions transitioned their students to the academic environment of graduate study with a discussion on the rigor of graduate education as compared to undergraduate education. The format for this discussion varied, but the message was most frequently delivered via a speech by a campus administrator and combined with mentions of academic resources.

Programming to address the transition from undergraduate to graduate study is necessary to address the variation in students' prior experiences (Willison & Gibson, 2011). Meeting one-on-one with the assigned faculty advisor prior to the beginning of classes is one effective intervention during the transition (Taub & Komives, 1998). This practice is potentially more effective than mentioning the challenges associated with the transition in a campus-wide address because it allows students the opportunity to individualize their transition experience and identify potential gaps in their prior education (Almeida et al., 2019).

Field Specificity

More than one third (n = 14) of graduate orientation programs did not address academic acculturation in an institution-wide setting, instead allowing individual academic departments to design programming for this outcome. Almost all orientation programs allotted time for academic departments to meet with incoming students or expected academic departments to arrange their own time to do so. A common

expectation for this time is that departments acculturate students to graduate study, as well as their specific field of study.

This practice allowed academic departments to handle academic acculturation independently, addressing the nuanced expectations and cultures of each field. The nature of these departmental sessions should vary by student need and create opportunities for students to connect with their new classmates and colleagues. Faculty and staff members play a key role in introducing students to department culture (Poock, 2006).

ADJUSTMENT FOR SUPPORTERS
Family members and loved ones often make significant adjustments to support graduate students' success (Sakamoto, 2006). Graduate students' supporters could benefit from orientation programming, but this is much less common in graduate orientation than in undergraduate orientation (Ward-Roof et al., 2008). While 18 programs addressed this outcome, only 10 of the 18 did so with specific programming. These findings suggest that institutions rarely consider this population when designing orientation programming for graduate students. This is additionally concerning because graduate students are more likely than undergraduates to be student parents (Hoffer et al., 2006).

While 14 institutions indicated that students' supporters are welcome to attend orientation, only three hosted concurrent programming for those supporters. One notable program hosted a concurrent welcome week for supporters, with programming to support their transition to a new city, build community among supporters, and introduce them to their students' new environment. Seven institutions acknowledged that graduate students are often managing a more complex series of responsibilities by including programming for graduate students with dependents. GSOP should aid in the transition process for the supporters of graduate students and coordinate robust programming for this population. The success of graduate students can be dependent on the emotional, financial, and childcare support they receive from their network of supporters. Graduate students can need more support balancing their academic and personal responsibilities than undergraduate students (Springer et al., 2009). Effective and impactful GSOP must include intentional space for students' supporters and additional resources for supporters.

Implications
Orientation and graduate education professionals can use this taxonomy of practices to guide institutional assessment of their own GSOP. While the essential outcomes of graduate orientation have been outlined in the literature, these findings connect specific practices to five of those outcomes: (a) campus logistics and navigation

of systems, (b) interpersonal belonging, (c) institutional belonging, (d) academic acculturation, and (e) adjustment for supporters.

A key recommendation that continues to emerge in the literature is that orientation professionals and student affairs divisions should engage in GSOP (Poock, 2006). These findings indicate that it is graduate education professionals, not orientation professionals, who design or implement GSOP. The inclusion of orientation and transition professionals in designing and implementing GSOP is a key step toward grounding graduate orientation in the best practices identified for the population.

While institutions are incorporating campus logistics and interpersonal belonging programming into GSOP, there is less attention placed on institutional belonging and academic acculturation. Rarely addressed in GSOP is the adjustment of supporters. In Witkowsky's (2012) research study, most of the respondents had significant others and children. Specific programming to help families and supporters to connect not only with information about their graduate students but also with one another stood out to the researchers as a novel idea. Concurrent programming for supporters and social media connections are two examples found at just a few institutions.

Orientation professionals could aid in addressing the gaps in practices identified in this study and share resources from student affairs divisions to build a more robust wellness and socially focused orientation for incoming graduate students. For example, as Dilks (2021) and Witkowsky (2012) have pointed out, graduate students have specific needs, such as acculturation into the identity of their profession and that of a specialized academic or professional practitioner. They also have support needs that extend across socioemotional experiences, such as social support, time management, and mental health. Marketing strategies to help connect graduate students to these other support services, which are traditionally marketed to undergraduate students, would likely make a difference.

In particular, the practices outlined in Table 1 serve as a framework for institutions' assessment and evaluation of their own GSOP. It also offers graduation education professionals guidance in building upon their existing GSOP or designing a new one.

Limitations
Several limitations of this study warrant further exploration and discussion. First, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits the ability to generalize prevalence estimates using the findings. The results may be dependent on how a given institutional respondent interpreted the questions. For example, a given contact may be more aware of program-level graduate orientation practices than of efforts focused on students of underrepresented or minoritized backgrounds. Additionally, these

surveys were conducted prior to the widespread restrictions and consequences of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Post-COVID-19 higher education is likely to change dramatically (Tesar, 2020), further limiting the generalizability of this programmatic snapshot. In particular, the finding that few programs implemented virtual delivery of orientation programming may have changed. Future work can focus on diving more deeply into institutional practices by surveying focus groups made up of institutional representatives and of students who can both acknowledge orientation program components and rate their impressions of salience and efficacy.

Second, the synchronous methodological approach to conducting oral surveys for this study provided an increased chance of social desirability bias within the dataset. The concept of social desirability bias refers to a participant's desire to present favorably to the researchers despite institutional anonymity within the study's results. Our results may contain some semblance of favorability toward participant institutions due to social desirability bias. Question-order bias may have played a part in the comprehensiveness of some respondent answers, and confirmation bias may be present in part because researchers built no skepticism into the method. That is, all responses were taken at face value and presumed to be a true and accurate representation of institutional practices.

Further research should explore the voices and lived experiences of various graduate student populations (e.g., Latinx, Black, first-generation, womxn) to determine the effectiveness of specific GSOP student success variables and the intervention components with which these populations resonate.

While the research team acknowledges limitations, this study explored an under-researched programmatic area and student population within the realm of student affairs. The strengths of this study include a diverse sample of participant institutions from all U.S. Census regions (West, Midwest, Northeast, South) and of varying sizes (i.e., small, medium, and large as defined by Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education; Center for Postsecondary Research, 2019).

Conclusion

Postbaccalaureate academic departments and graduate schools offer a plethora of services and resources to support graduate students. Unfortunately, student affairs professionals generally focus on the undergraduate student population and dedicate less attention to engaging the graduate student population. This lack of attention can stem from the misconception that graduate students are adequately prepared to succeed at their postbaccalaureate studies due to their experience navigating the higher education environment as undergraduate students (Pontius & Harper, 2006). This is ultimately

to the detriment of graduate students' experience, as they report fears and anxieties similar to undergraduate students during their transition (Poock, 2002), and orientation programs alleviate this anxiety (Hullinger & Hogan, 2014). This ideological perspective neglects the specific intersectional and developmental needs of graduate students. Building a network of support for the graduate student begins with robust orientation programming that addresses the wide variety of outcomes outlined here.

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