

Student Activities JOURNAL



SUMMER ORIENTATION: It's Not Just for Freshmen!

By Jonathan Ambrose

As the weather warms up, flowers are blooming; we know that another semester is coming to a close. When many of us in Student Affairs would love to take the summer to evaluate the previous year and keep everything quiet for a few months, there is an untapped source of new students arriving on campus weekly. This is not some new phenomenon nor is it a new program. It is orientation. So why would it be beneficial for you to be involved with orientation? Many of you might ask yourself, why are we talking about orientation, after all for some universities orientation falls within Student Affairs but for others like Southeastern Louisiana, it does not. And some of us, mainly those of us that deal with facilities like a Student Union, are so busy with the constant flow of parents and potential students of the orientation program; it's hard to imagine getting even more involved. My division's role with orientation had always been as a support service, but there are benefits to being more involved. Here are some ideas that the Division for Student Affairs DSA professionals at Southeastern have implemented to create a greater impact on our incoming freshman.

With orientations filled with nervous parents and excited new students, the orientation team is made up of staff members and most importantly the orientation leaders. These leaders are many of your current students and they have the most one on one time with new freshman during orientation. Last year, we decided to host a DSA orientation for the orientation leaders. We held an ice cream social that allowed us to get familiar with these students, but also orient the student leaders to exactly what we wanted them to know about our individual departments, but most importantly what we, DSA had to offer incoming freshmen their first semester on campus. So for one hour and a little money, we gathered all department heads in DSA in a room with 20 student leaders interacting with each other, laughing and having a good time with a very short, informal presentation. Not only did we get to know the orientation leaders better, we were able to feed the information that we wanted freshman to know about our departments with just a little planning and money.

Another idea that we decided to pursue was hosting a luncheon for the orientation students. Now you might start to think: 1) this is going to take a lot of effort to pull off, 2) who is funding it and 3) is there a benefit. Let me just say it like this: Most of you reading this article are in programming in some way at your school and all of you have planned and executed events for a large number of students. This means that you need to take the reign and lead this effort. Get everyone in the division involved, create a committee for it. Make sub committees; put people in charge of different areas of the luncheon, similarly to running your department. Now that you have it planned out how are you going to fund it? Feeding anywhere from 400-600 students 5 times in a summer can be very expensive. We came across the same problem when we started to look at adding this program in the summer. We decided to approach some of the local restaurants to see if they would be interested in co hosting this event. Every restaurant we approached had the same question—how is this going to benefit my restaurant? The answer is very simple. You have an attentive group of students with some of them being new to the area, showcase your best product and if the students like it they will come to your restaurant to eat again. It worked and we had three of six luncheons last summer sponsored by local restaurants. We did end up having to pay for three luncheons but we served a Louisiana favorite that is very inexpensive, jambalaya.

Last year during the luncheon, our program consisted of a 13 minute DSA promotional video, introductions of all department heads, door prizes, free t-shirts, etc ... After evaluating the program, we found that during our luncheon, held on the second day of a two day orientation, we over stimulated our new freshman with completely too much information. Instead of giving them the essentials that all freshman need to know regarding our departments. This year we have cut 95% of the information that we had in the program last year and instead decided to focus on one main division event: welcome week.

Times have been tough with budget cuts. Tensions are growing with new stipulations arising like Louisiana has with the LA Grad Act, (Legislation that has imposed performance measures for state universities to meet within six years. In order to raise tuition each year of the six years and to keep its state funding after the completion of the six years, each Louisiana university must set performance goals and meet these goals. One of the performance measures is increasing our overall graduation rate in those six years, so the entire university community must be doing its part to retain, progress, and graduate students in six years.)

We know that students who get involved in everything the university has to offer have a better chance of being well-rounded with a greater success rate in college. TAP INTO THE UNCHARTED WATERS OF ORIENTATION if you have not done so by now.

By getting your information in front of freshman early at orientation, you are getting ahead by making sure these students know what your department has to offer them. Our goal was to get one on one time with them early so that we weren't playing catch up during their first semester. By making this investment early, you will see an overall greater participation of freshman in your program and in your division.



Jonathan Ambrose is the Director of the Student Union at Southeastern Louisiana University. Southeastern Louisiana University is a public university in Hammond Louisiana with an enrollment of over 15,000 students. Jonathan has been at the Student Union for four years with five years at Southeastern. He is the advisor for College Republicans, Southeastern Fishing Club, and Kappa Sigma. He grew up in central Louisiana in the small town of Tioga. Jonathan received his B.A. ('03) from Saint Peter's College, where he was a three time All-American football player and a 2008 inductee to the Hall of Fame. He received his M.A. ('04) from the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Jonathan is married to Mandy and has two children, Wes 3 and JoElle 1. He is an avid outdoorsman where he enjoys hunting deer, ducks, turkey, bass fishing, and bow fishing.

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