



Annual Assessment Report Template: Non-Learning
Academic Year: 2015-2016

Date of Report Submission: July 7, 2016

Name of Department: Residential Education

Name of Contact Person: Samantha Schenk

Name of Person(s) completing report or contributing to the project: Daniel Fotoples, Tiffany Fulford, Johanna Gruenewald, Stacey Jaksa, Samantha Schenk, Kathleen Sullivan,

Type of Assessment: Needs

I. Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the needs of residential students during the first six weeks of the academic year, with specific focus on Residential Education's Welcome Week programming that occurs the week prior to the start of classes. Focus groups were conducted, involving first-year students that attended, first-year students that did not attend, and upper-class students that did not attend Welcome Week events. Themes that emerged included College Transitions, Navigating Campus Spaces, and DePaul Campus Activities and Involvement. In addition, there was one theme that spoke to specifically upper-class students. As a result of the findings, some student experiences affirm previous literature, such as community building efforts and finding out about events offered by the Office of Student Involvement. However, much of the themes indicate that there are areas that are missing from Welcome Week programming. These missing areas include, relationships with faculty and academic staff, and navigating the city with regard to transportation, activities and opportunities offered in the City, and encountering different identities in an urban setting. While some of these themes are addressed in Welcome Week events offered beyond Residential Education, there is something to be said that these areas were discussed as lacking even after the completion of all Welcome Week programming. Findings further support continued discussions and reviews of Welcome Week with collaborators meeting from various offices across the Division of Student Affairs to determine the future of Welcome Week programming at DePaul University.

II. Assessment Question

The assessment questions addressed were the following:

What are the transitional needs of first-year residential students in the first Quarter?
What challenges may residential students in general encounter and which groups could Residential Education better serve through Welcome Week programming?

III. Introduction & Context

Residential Education was interested in examining how our current Welcome Week programming meets the needs of our residential students during their first week on campus. Welcome Week programming for Residential Education takes place the week

before classes start. This week is also known as Immersion Week, where students enrolled in Discover Chicago Quarter courses participate in day long excursions in the city based on their course theme. Residential students involved in this class also move-in just before immersion week so that they can participate in the class excursions. As such, Residential Education's Welcome Week programming occurs in the evening of that same week, as a means to provide opportunities to learn and engage with the campus community. A great deal of time, energy, and financial resources by student and department staff are spent on Welcome Week, all with the intention of the programming meeting the transitional needs of residential students. However, such transitional needs have not been examined in recent years.

University Context

Residential Education's assessment project specifically connects to Objective 1a of Vision 2018. Objective 1a strives to ground the university's academic programs and student services in student learning and success. By evaluating the transitional needs of first year students through focus groups, Residential Education is able to strengthen its Welcome Week programs, build on retention and graduation rates, and find better ways to provide critical student services to assist with the transition into the college experience. This assessment supports the Vision 2018 strategic plan by addressing gaps in student service opportunities and finding ways to build on the sense of community at DePaul.

Furthermore, although this project is a needs assessment and a learning outcome is not being assessed, the assessment project more broadly addresses Divisional Learning Outcome Domain #6: "Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will develop a strong sense of personal identity and form mature, respectful relationships with others." By engaging in a needs assessment of our Welcome Week Programming, we are critically examining the opportunities we provide for our residents to develop personal identity and form relationships with others.

The mission of our department focuses on providing a residential community that "students are encouraged to explore, learn and develop holistically." College students, first-year students in particular, may struggle with the adjustment to the college experience. Through our needs assessment, we are able to better deliver on our mission. Our findings will help us to support students in finding community in their residential environments and provide opportunities for them to be exposed to new ideas and challenge their own perspectives.

Supporting Scholarship

The Importance of Transitions

Schlossberg's transition theory (1995) defines transition as "event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (p. 111). As a result, Higgins (2010) states "starting college and moving into a residence hall is a hallmark event in a student's life, characterized by a major shift in relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (p. 12). Schlossberg suggests the four major factors impacting students transition include situation, self, support, and strategies. A substantial change of environment is the "situation" students are in, and office programming serves as the "support" students need. Moreover, in an era of outcomes-based practice in higher education, many institutions have increasingly begun to focus explicitly on retention and

graduation rates. Though retention work is complex and multi-faceted, the initial transition of incoming first-year and transfer students has been identified as a crucial component. The first term in particular is a critical window during which institutions must facilitate students' successful acclimation to campus in order to retain them. Tinto (1993) and Gardner (1986) argue that "institutions have a very small window of opportunity to establish connections with students, as 75% of non-returning students will withdraw during or immediately following their first semester" (as cited in Soria, Clark, & Koch, 2013, p.34).

The Role of Housing/Residential Life in Welcome Week Programs

Though aspects of housing and residential life are often thoroughly infused into Welcome Week structures, there is little research on the specific and unique contributions of these offices in facilitating student transitions through such programming. According to Zeller (1991) from Association of College and University Housing Officers - International (ACUHO-I), the goals for residential life professionals for program development that relate to Welcome Week purposes include serving as a component of new student orientation, assisting with transition to university community, and providing high quality programs which enhance student retention and academic success. Welcome Week Programs are a way to initiate community building. In support Astin (1985) mentions the stronger a community is in the residential areas, the more likely students are involved in that community and therefore will be more likely to succeed academically and persist to graduation. In addition, the National Association of Orientation Directors (NODA) has developed an Orientation Planning Manual with best practices in program design that can inform the work of all professionals involved in Welcome Week planning.

Best Practices: Determining Student Needs

Though there is considerable variance in the structures of extended orientation programs, or Welcome Weeks as many are called, all are designed to promote student success and development by "[integrating] students into the academic and social fabric of the campus community" (Soria, 2013). Broadly speaking, Welcome Week programming "provides a mechanism for sharing traditions, resources, opportunities, and expectations"(Soria, Clark, & Koch, 2013, p.37) That said, it is essential that institutions develop more specific, campus-based goals and objectives in order to maximize impact. According to the Welcome Week chapter of the NODA Orientation Planning Manual, the key to determining the contents of the program is to "get to know the developmental needs of your students and make sure to keep the overarching goals of your welcome week in mind when planning events" (Drumm & Kollett, 2010, p.43).

IV. Data Collection & Methodology

Data Collection

The population of interest for the assessment project was residential students who were invited to attend the 2015 Welcome Week (about 2,534 students). Utilizing event participation data from OrgSync and absence of attendance when compared to a campus roster during Welcome Week, the methodology for the assessment project consisted of focus groups that were organized into three groups: First-Year residents that attended, First-Year residents that did not attend, and Upper-class residents that did not attend

Welcome Week. For the group of first-year residents that attended Welcome Week, participants were specifically selected that had attended at least three out of five of the 2015 Welcome Week events. Having the three group-types were thought to be most useful to answer the assessment questions based on the range of experience with Welcome Week and the range in class standing in residential students that we serve. Upper-class students who did attend welcome week were not included in the project due to the low numbers in attendance by upper-class students. Those sampled were emailed and invited to participate in the focus groups. The specific sample of participants consisted of 188 (out of 612) Upper-Class students that did not attend the 2015 Welcome Week, 54 (out of 673) First-Year students that attended the 2015 Welcome Week, and 45 First-year students that did not attend the 2015 Welcome Week. During all four focus groups, two professional staff members from the department facilitated and documented dialogue among the focus group participants. See Appendix A for focus group questions.

Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, there were two professional staff members in each focus group. Both professional staff members took notes on participant responses. This ensured that all information was gathered from the participants. A tape/digital recorder was not used in the focus groups. Each question asked had four sections with pre-determined domains where the facilitators could include their notes. The pre-determined domains included: *Academic Success (grades, drop/add, majors, faculty/advisors, etc.)*; *Connectedness (sense of belonging, peer-peer, student-staff)*; *Life Skills (finances, personal wellness, city life, etc.)*; and *Other (catch-all if needed)*. These pre-determined domains were developed from both the literature and information about programming at peer institutions.

However, upon initial review of the focus group notes, it was apparent that the pre-determined domains did not best represent the most notable themes that were emerging. As a result, a grounded theory approach to the analysis of the notes was conducted. Under the guidance of assessment project lead, Samantha Schenk, two graduate interns, Tiffany Fulford and Kathleen Sullivan assisted in the theme generation process. The focus group notes were initially read through without taking any notes at all. Initial themes were then noted by each individual intern during a second review of the notes. Samantha Schenk, Tiffany Fulford, and Kathleen Sullivan reviewed the initial themes from each intern and a comprehensive list of themes were established. The focus group notes were reviewed for a third time and coded based on the final theme list. See Appendix B for focus group scoring guide.

Participant Consent

Consent was collected through a paper form completed by all participants before the focus groups started. The consent form informed participants of their role and outlined the assessment project. Participation in focus group was voluntary. Students who signed and dated the printed form indicated their consent to be in the project. See Appendix C for Adult Consent to Participate in Research form.

The facilitator's notes were kept and stored securely. Participants' information was not linked to any statements made in the focus groups. Findings did not include their name or any information that would directly identify them. Every effort was made to prevent individuals not on the project team from knowing which participants gave information, or what that information was.

For participating, pizza and a \$5 gift card to The Bean (an on-campus dining service) was provided to all students.

V. Data & Results

Of those sampled, nine upper-class residents out of 188, two first-year students that did not attend Welcome Week out of 45, and seven first-year students that attended Welcome Week of 54 participated in the focus groups. Beyond class standing (First-year vs. Upper-class), no other demographic information was collected from the participants.

Focus Group Themes

The following themes emerged from the review of the focus group notes (with a 54% inter-rater agreement):

- *College Transition*: The mention of transitions as it relates to relationships with academic advisors/faculty, academic processes/logistics, and/or navigating physical campus spaces.
- *Navigating Campus Spaces*: The discussion of their experiences in navigating city transportation, activities and opportunities in the city and encountering different identities in an urban setting.
- *DePaul Campus Activities and Involvement*: The mention of marketing techniques, community building events and initiatives and OSI sponsored events.
- *Upper-class specific Themes*: The discussion around upper-class student specific activities, including transfer students and group specific transition themes (i.e. being from out of state, international students, etc.).

VI. Discussion & Interpretation of Results

From the themes that emerged from the focus groups, college transition and navigating the college and local communities are most salient to students around the time that Welcome Week takes place. One participant mentioned, “It’s hard to figure out what to do and where to go for fun in the city.” Another participant mentioned that they were most familiar with information about DePaul University, but that they didn’t know how to take the train on the first day of their classes.

By including upper-class students, many of whom voiced being transfer students, the perspective of not feeling that Welcome Week was for them, but still being unsure of similar aspects of transition that first-year participants expressed: navigating the campus and train, involvement opportunities, and advising resources. There was an additional concern around marketing for social and involvement opportunities that were specific to upper-class residents in the halls. One participant shared that she wished there were events that were advertised to be for upper-class residents only.

A major limitation of the project was recruiting participants for the focus groups. There were a few sessions that had to be rescheduled and invitations to participate had to be repeatedly sent out. When the focus groups had been scheduled and plans to participate confirmed with students, only a few would actually attend. As such, there are great limitations in what can be understood from the experiences discussed in the focus groups and the themes that emerged. However, the themes do support previous research mentioned in the literature review and some of the programming observed by institutions we benchmarked with on welcome week programming.

Within the past few years, discussions have begun around the programming and efforts during welcome week, particularly around it meeting the needs of students and

more innovative ways to engage students in their first few weeks of the quarter. This project directly contributes to that discussion in the Department of Residential Education and in the Division of Student Affairs. It is the intention of the project to provide guidance for further discussion in how Welcome Week could be better in the coming years.

VII. Recommendations and Plans for Action

Recommendations

Based on the themes that emerged from the focus groups, it is apparent that there are particular areas of the student experience that are missing from Welcome Week programming. Such areas include the presence of academic advisors and faculty, as well as opportunities to engage specifically with transfer students. A re-alignment of programming efforts based on the themes would better prepare and engage our students in the first few weeks of the quarter. This should be a shared endeavor among key partners associated with Welcome Week (e.g., Residential Education, Office of Student Involvement, and New Student and Family Engagement). Throughout the focus groups, comments were made about the confusion around what was considered Welcome Week by Residential Education compared to New Student and Family Engagement. In addition, a stronger involvement with faculty and academic advisors was something that came out of the “College Transitions” theme that could be further explored. Participants expressed wanting to see more opportunities to meet faculty and academic advisors, particularly outside of the class/advising meetings.

Action Plan

July: Project findings shared with Residential Education Department at the Summer Professional Staff Training.

July/August: Residential education Welcome Week Organizers, Matthew Schultz and Brittany Royce, to organize Welcome Week events for Fall 2016 based on assessment project themes.

August: Findings shared and used for Resident Advisor program planning for first six weeks of Fall Quarter.

On-Going: residential Education Rod Waters, to reference assessment findings in divisional planning meetings regarding future Welcome Weeks.

Sharing the results

It is Residential education’s plan to share findings from the assessment project with Welcome Week division partners and resident advisors. These two groups are our primary collaborators in creating Welcome Week events. In addition, the results will be shared with staff in Residential Education during the Summer Professional Staff Training. The assessment project has major implications on the future of how Welcome Week is planned and implemented. As such, the findings from the assessment project will be relevant for years to come in how Welcome Week is shaped over time.

APPENDIX A

Welcome Week Focus Group Questions

- Thinking back to your first few weeks on campus, what were some of the biggest challenges you faced?
 - What did you do/where did you go to address some of those challenges?

<u>Academic Success</u> (grades, drop/add, majors, faculty/advisors, etc.)	<u>Connectedness</u> (sense of belonging, peer-peer, student-staff)
<u>Life Skills</u> (finances, personal wellness, city life, etc.)	<u>Other</u> (catch-all if needed)

- Thinking back to your first weeks on campus, were there things that came easy for you (as compared to Question #1)?

<u>Academic Success</u> (grades, drop/add, majors, faculty/advisors, etc.)	<u>Connectedness</u> (sense of belonging, peer-peer, student-staff)
<u>Life Skills</u> (finances, personal wellness, city life, etc.)	<u>Other</u> (catch-all if needed)

- If you were to plan an event for future incoming students, what do you think would be most helpful for them?
 - Were there specific events that were helpful for you?

<u>Academic Success</u> (grades, drop/add, majors, faculty/advisors, etc.)	<u>Connectedness</u> (sense of belonging, peer-peer, student-staff)
<u>Life Skills</u> (finances, personal wellness, city life, etc.)	<u>Other</u> (catch-all if needed)

- [Other questions – please specify]

<u>Academic Success</u> (grades, drop/add, majors, faculty/advisors, etc.)	<u>Connectedness</u> (sense of belonging, peer-peer, student-staff)
<u>Life Skills</u> (finances, personal wellness, city life, etc.)	<u>Other</u> (catch-all if needed)

APPENDIX B
Focus Group Scoring Guide

Overall Theme		Focus Group: First-Year Attended (Group 1)	Focus Group: First-Year Attended (Group 2)	Focus Group: First-Year Not Attended	Focus Group: Upper-Class Not Attended
	College Transition				
	<i>Relationships w/Academic Advisors/Faculty</i>				
	<i>Academic Processes/Logistics</i>				
	<i>Navigating Campus Spaces</i>				
	Navigating Chicago				
	<i>Navigating City Transportation</i>				
	<i>Activities/Opportunities in City</i>				
	<i>Encountering Different Identities (in an Urban Environment)</i>				
	Campus Activities & Involvement				
	<i>Marketing</i>				
	<i>Community Building</i>				
	<i>OSI Sponsored Events</i>				
Upper-Class Specific Themes					
	Upper-class Student Specific Activities				
	Group-Specific Transition				
	<i>Total:</i>				

APPENDIX C

ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Weeks of Welcome & First 6 Weeks

Investigators: Daniel Fotoples, Stacey Jaksa, Samantha Schenk

Department: Residential Education

What is the purpose of this project?

The purpose of this project is to investigate the needs of residential students during the first six weeks of the academic year, with specific focus on Weeks of Welcome that occurs in the week prior and after classes start.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?

You are being asked to participate in the project due to your participation/absence in welcome week events in Fall 2015.

What is involved in being in the project?

Residents were randomly selected to participate in this project through participation in an one-hour focus group. During the focus group, you will be asked to participate in a discussion regarding your experience with and thoughts on Weeks of Welcome and the first six weeks of the academic year. A set of predetermined questions will be asked of the group and a group facilitator will ask these questions while taking note of what is said within the group.

How much time will this take?

The focus group is expected to take about one (1) hour to complete.

Are there any risks involved in participating in this project?

By participating or things said during the focus group will not be held against you or impact your status as a residential student. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to. There is the possibility that others may find out what you have said, but we have put protections in place to prevent this from happening.

Are there any benefits to participating in this project?

You will not personally benefit from being in this study. You may indirectly benefit from having a greater awareness of your experience at the beginning of the year and what to prepare for in the coming academic years.

We hope that what we learn will help us in developing and implementing new Weeks of Welcome events that better suit the needs of the residential students.

Is there any kind of payment, reimbursement or credit for being in this project?

Participants will receive free pizza and a gift card to the Bean Café, located on campus.

Can you decide not to participate?

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw from the project after you begin participating. Your decision whether or not to be in the project will not affect your status as a residential student.

Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?

The facilitator notes will be kept and stored securely. Your information will not be linked to any statements made in the focus groups. We will not include your name or any information that will directly identify you. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the project team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the project or you want to get additional information or provide input about this project, you can contact the project coordinator, Samantha Schenk, M.Ed. at 773-325-7207, sschenk1@depaul.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent from the Subject:

I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By signing below, I indicate my consent to be in the project.

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____