Welcome Week Transition Needs of Residential Students

What are the transitional needs of first-year residential students in the first quarter, and how might Welcome Week programming address these challenges?

Methodology

- Utilizing event participation data from OrgSync, focus groups were conducted with first-year residents who attended Welcome Week, and first-year and upper-class residents that did not attend Welcome Week.
- Originally, notes for each question were organized into four pre-determined domains based on literature and programming at peer institutions: academic success, connectedness, life skills and other.
- Upon initial review of the focus group notes, it was apparent that the pre-determined domains did not best represent the most notable themes and a grounded theory approach was utilized to analyze the data into themes.
- Themes were identified using a four step process that included: an initial read through of the notes, a second reading of the notes leading to preliminary theme identification, creating a comprehensive list of themes derived from preliminary themes and using the final themes to code the notes upon a final reading.

Demographics

- 673 residential students attended Welcome Week and 612 residential students did not attend Welcome Week.
- The sample included 54 first-year students who did attend Welcome Week, along with 188 upper-class residents and 45 first-year residents who did not attend Welcome Week.
- Focus group participants included 7 first-year residents who did attend Welcome Week, along with 9 upper-class residents and 2 first-year residents who did not attend Welcome Week.

Plan of Action

- Consider how to infuse opportunities to cultivate relationships with academic advisors or faculty and include upper-class and transfer students into programming.
- In partnership with the Office of Student Involvement; New Student and Family engagement; University Ministry; and the Center for Identity, Inclusion, and Social Change, re-align programming efforts based on themes that would better prepare and engage our students in the first few weeks of the quarter.

Key Findings

- The following themes emerged from the review of the focus group notes (with a 54% inter-rater agreement): college transition, navigating campus spaces, DePaul campus activities and involvement, and upper-class specific needs.
- Themes related to college transition and navigating the college and local communities were most salient to students around the time that Welcome Week occurred.
- Upper-class students, many of whom voiced being transfer students, did not feel that Welcome Week was for them even though they shared similar transition uncertainties voiced by first-year participants.

“It’s hard to figure out what to do and where to go for fun in the city.”