

Examining the influence of different new student orientation delivery methods on academic
performance and student retention

by

Holly Gerke

B.S., University of Wisconsin Stout, 2015
M.S., University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, 2017

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Special Education, Counseling and Student Affairs
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

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The study examined the effects of a scaffolded, just-in-time orientation approach compared to a traditional, single-day format. Additionally, the influence of in-person versus virtual modalities was explored. Academic performance, quantified through grade point average (GPA) and credit completion ratio (CCR), alongside first-to-second-year retention, served as the pivotal outcome measures. Pearson's chi-square and ANOVA testing were used in this quantitative study to analyze the data.

No statistical significance was found when comparing first-to- second-year retention rates between the scaffolded and traditional orientation programs. It was found that students in the scaffolded program achieved statistically significant higher first and second semester GPAs compared to students who attended the traditional program. No statistical significance was found when analyzing credits completed between the two program cohorts. When looking at orientation modality, in-person versus virtual, statistical significance was found for both increased GPA and higher CCR when students attended in-person programming.

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To the two little Gerkes: You have become part of my why. I started this journey long before you entered my world, and I have finished it so proud to be your mom. I can only hope you know how proud I am of you both and how excited I am to see you take on the world. This work means little to you now, but it has reminded me that you can accomplish anything. Don't forget that.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to all the first-generation college students stepping into higher education with lofty goals and bright smiles. Do not let anyone dim your shine and always remember your why.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Orientation is often a required component for incoming students as they transition into higher education. Over time, orientation has become a critical piece of preparing students for success throughout their academic careers. Data overwhelmingly support this claim as effective orientation programs have been found to positively affect retention and overall graduation rates (Chan, 2019). While the positive impact of new student orientation programming is clear, an analysis and understanding of the factors that make an orientation program most successful are lacking in the research. In this study, I will take an in-depth look at the impact of two factors, timing and modality, on students' academic performance and first- to second-year retention.

Statement of the Problem

Most two- and four-year post-secondary institutions host an onboarding or orientation program for their incoming students to aid in the overall transition into higher education. Orientation program formats, delivery, lengths, timing, and more can vary greatly from institution to institution. A significant amount of research has been done to show the importance of orientation and its positive impact on first- to second-year student retention and on academic performance (Chasteen, 2005; Kafsky, 2001; Lehning, 2008; L. D. Patton, 2016; Yang, 2001). However, little is known about the potential differences between program formats and delivery and the impact that such differences may have on student's academic performance. Simply put, most higher education leaders understand that orientation is important, but institutions lack a full understanding of what methods will lead to even greater student success. The lack of specific investigations into these components is further compounded by the need for continual evaluation of orientation programs to ensure they meet the needs of current students. Just-in-time learning, also known as a scaffolded approach, is one arrangement that provides students with content and

information when it is most relevant. In summary, researchers have found evidence for positive impacts of orientation programs as a collective without knowing exactly what measures make them successful and without knowing what aspects higher education leaders should continue to assess and improve.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a colossal shift in the way universities onboard students. In a recent *Inside Higher Ed* article, EAB defined Generation Pandemic, or Gen P, as students whose college-going behaviors are influenced by their experience during the pandemic (Flaherty, 2023). The pandemic disrupted these students' adolescence, and the way they see college life and university onboarding is unique. During the pandemic, many universities were forced to swiftly create online orientations or to restructure in-person programs. Students emerging from the pandemic and entering higher education provoked orientation leaders to reevaluate program offerings and to get back to the basics of onboarding. A less-is-more approach became desired where community-building and personal values were stressed over quantity of information (Flaherty, 2023). Knowing students were under-socialized, academically under-prepared, and more concerned about not being mentally ready for college, many universities simplified their traditional programming. Some positive elements resulted from the onset of the pandemic, but many universities returned to pre-pandemic programming once a state of “normalcy” was achieved. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to pause and reevaluate students’ needs and expectations. Comparing student retention and academic success in pre-pandemic orientation programs to that of restructured, just-in-time programming can provide critical insights into what makes a successful onboarding experience for an incoming class.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact a scaffolded or “just-in-time” learning approach to orientation and onboarding programs has on academic performance and retention for first-year undergraduate students at a large, four-year, Research 1 institution. This quantitative study sought to identify differences in students' academic performance and retention at Louis Miles University (pseudonym) between those who participated in the scaffolded programs and those who attended single-day orientation programming. This research also examined differences in academic performance comparing modality, in-person or virtual, for orientation programs. Academic performance was measured by grade point average and credit completion rates at the end of both the first and second semesters of the first-year experience. Retention was measured by persistence to the sophomore year.

Research Questions

1. Are there significant differences in retention rates from the first to second year between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?
2. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?
3. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between those who attended in-person orientation programming compared to those who attended virtual programming?

Significance of Study

As universities strive to prepare their incoming students for success, orientation programming provides an opportunity to ensure a strong onboarding experience. Based on programming assessment and student feedback, institutions should implement changes to their orientation programming to best meet the needs of their students. The platform and delivery method are key components to consider when developing an onboarding experience but may be difficult to implement if university leadership does not have a full understanding of the key differences and student success impacts at stake. In an analysis of various orientation programs conducted by Matthew Chan (2019), it was found that out of 39 institutions, 38 provided in-person-only experiences. Only one offered students an option between in-person and virtual programming. The timeframe in which content is delivered can differ as well (Chan, 2019). “Just-in-time” learning, also known as a scaffolded approach, is one arrangement that provides students with content and information when it is most relevant. Just-in-time orientation experiences typically build throughout the summer leading up to the first day of class and have a core focus on community building. Traditional orientation programs cover a wide array of topics and include enrollment in courses all within a one to three-day program. Content provided in traditional experiences can easily overwhelm students and be forgotten prior to the first day of class (Flaherty, 2023). With this disparity in delivery methods, it is difficult to determine which orientation experiences better retain and lead to greater academic performance for students.

This study examined two different orientation programs offered at Louis Miles University. Each program is different in terms of programming, modality, timing, and desired outcomes. By examining student retention and academic performance in both cohorts, determinations were made as to which orientation program was more effective. This research can

better inform orientation staff and university leadership as they plan their onboarding experiences in future terms. The findings of this study lead to recommendations to assist in creating equitable orientation programming for all incoming students attending a large, public institution.

Definitions

Grade Point Average (GPA) is a system used in high schools and universities, mainly in the U.S., to measure a student's performance and academic achievement. GPA is calculated by converting grades or percentages received (A, B, C, etc.) to a corresponding point on the GPA scale (McCabe, 2023).

Credit Completion Ratio (CCR) is the ratio of credit earned to credits attempted.

Retention Rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following year. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates who attended the previous fall and are enrolled in the current fall semester (*Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates*, 2022).

Orientation Programs are any effort on the part of an institution to give incoming students a chance to explore campus, to connect with peers, and to learn about available resources (Wood, 2022).

Scaffolded Approach is an instructional technique where a teacher or educator provides temporary support to students as they learn new concepts or skills. This support is gradually removed as students become more competent, allowing them to develop independence and mastery (Vygotsky, 1978).

New Student Orientation (NSO) at Louis Miles University's main campus is a scaffolded program designed to assist students and their families with advising and enrollment, onboarding, and transition. NSO is required for all new students.

Orientation and Enrollment (O&E) at Louis Miles University was a single-day program, required for new students and their families.

Traditional Orientation Program Description

Orientation and Enrollment (O&E) was a traditional one-day, orientation program was required for all new undergraduate students at Louis Miles University (LMU). Students registered for one of nineteen orientation days offered throughout the month of June, before students' first fall. The traditional orientation program ran for over twenty years, with the last full program ending in the fall of 2019. The primary focus of the program was to get students enrolled in their first semester of classes. The event was designed to help students and families prepare for their first semester at LMU. The schedule consisted of a Tips for Success session led by the Dean of Students, a show put on by student staff showcasing different resources on campus, and a group advising session to enroll in first-semester classes. Additional opt-in sessions included pre-law, pre-health, modern language testing, residence hall tours, and an expo showcasing over 30 campus resources to students and their families. The full day ran from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. O&E programming was offered exclusively in-person. A schedule of events provided to participants is shown in Appendix A.

Scaffolded Orientation Program Description

New Student Orientation (NSO) at LMU is a post-pandemic scaffolded program that was piloted in the summer of 2022. The scaffolded program has three primary goals. The first is for students to feel connected to the LMU community and begin to develop a sense of belonging.

Second, students will understand academic and community expectations as well as tools for student success, including systems, policies, and community norms. Finally, students will begin to take ownership of their college experience and identify the unique needs of their educational journey to help them navigate the transition to college and ultimately succeed in college.

NSO consists of three components: virtual academic advising and enrollment, orientation, and a kickoff program. Each component is an independent part of the larger program, which progressively develops over the summer. One-on-one academic advising appointments are hosted virtually for all incoming students. This appointment provides students an individual setting to connect with their advisor, understand how they will support them throughout their time in college, ask questions, and enroll in their first semester of classes. Students can schedule virtual appointments at a time most convenient for them, starting as early as mid-April when open enrollment begins at LMU.

After students have met with their advisor and enrolled in their first semester they attend orientation, the second component of NSO. Orientation is a one-day program hosted on campus designed for students and their families to discover all the opportunities LMU has to offer. Virtual offerings are also available for students unable to travel to campus. The program primarily takes place in June, with additional dates scheduled in July and August. The summer experience includes meeting other new students, connecting with their academic college, receiving their student ID card, and learning important information for a successful first year.

The final component of NSO is Kickoff. This three-and-a-half-day program occurs prior to the start of classes in August and is built to assist in the overall transition to college. All new students attend Kickoff events after moving to campus. Programming offers various opportunities to connect with other incoming students, meet faculty and staff within their major

of study, attend large social events, learn university traditions, and engage with important campus resources right before classes begin. Kickoff provides students the opportunity to experience a small taste of what life as a college student is like.

The programming offered from April through August builds upon itself to create a solid foundation to start college. The scaffolded approach to onboarding allows content to be delivered when the information is most pertinent (Cloke, 2022). A timeline of NSO programming and orientation schedule is provided in Appendix B.

Summary

New student orientation programs are an important component in onboarding new students as they transition into higher education (A. L. Patton, 2017). Orientation experiences should meet the ever-changing needs of today's students. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced universities to quickly rethink, redesign, and reevaluate their orientation programs. Several studies have been conducted looking at the overall impact of orientation programs as it relates to student retention and academic success, but little can be found when comparing different structures and modalities of orientation programs. By specifically directing this research towards orientation structure, orientation administrators can gain a better understanding of students' needs while onboarding and can work to implement orientation programming that leads to higher rates of retention and increased academic performance amongst first-year students.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Chapter two focuses on the review of literature regarding the topics of retention and academic success of new college students in addition to specific findings related to orientation programs. The first portion of this chapter focuses on theoretical perspectives and models related to the retention and persistence of college students at American institutions of post-secondary learning. The second portion focuses on an overview of orientation programs in higher education and the value these programs add to student retention and academic success. Specific attention is provided to best practices, the onboarding of Generation Z, insights into transitioning focus to Generation Alpha, and the scaffolded approach to orientation information disbursement.

Post-Secondary Retention

Retention and overall academic success have become buzzwords within higher education and continue to be key goals for many American institutions. Retaining students between matriculation and degree completion is on the minds of administrators across the country. Many universities have included increased retention rates in their strategic plans but lack the directives to achieve the imperatives. Within the past several decades, there has been a powerful emphasis on retention-focused research to better understand what strategies and practices assist in increasing student retention.

Importance of Retention

Many key stakeholders have their attention on student retention within the higher education setting. Institutional leaders, university donors, state and federal governments, and faculty understand the importance of student retention. Being accepted into a post-secondary institution is one thing; returning for the sophomore year and pushing through to receiving a diploma is quite another (*Retention and Graduation Rates*, 2021). It is thought that college

attrition is not only a personal loss to the student but also a loss to the institution and society as a whole (“The State of American Jobs,” 2016). Students who do not complete a college degree have been considered at a disadvantage for fiscal gains and social mobility. Societies have been considered more progressive and productive with an increased number of college graduates or educated citizens (Trostel, 2015).

Institutions of higher education have had the added pressure of maintaining competitive retention and graduation rates with the inclusion of this data as a measure of accountability. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the average retention rate amongst post-secondary institutions in 2022 was 76.5% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Publicized rankings systems sharing retention rates, four and six-year graduation rates, alongside scholarship offerings have put added pressure on institutions to have high percentages. After the passing of the Clery Act in 1990, universities that receive federal funding are required, by law, to reveal their graduation rates among other statistics related to campus security policies and procedures, and campus crime statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The overarching goal of this legislation is to provide prospective students and their families with data about institutions of higher education to assist in their college search process.

Retention rates have become standard elements of reports to state and federal government agencies, as well as to accrediting bodies (Berger et al., 2012). The call for increased accountability has been echoed at the state and national levels with mandated reporting of performance measures, including retention and graduation rates. Beyond reporting requirements, society has been impacted by retention concerns. There are many benefits to achieving a post-secondary degree beyond increased earnings. A report from the Lumina Foundation and Gallup revealed a host of positive outcomes associated with going to college. Improved personal health,

positive character traits, and increased civic engagement were a few of the outcomes (Alonso, 2023). In the last federal election, 87% of those who hold a bachelor's degree voted compared to only 59% of those with no post-secondary education. Also, 62% of those with a bachelor's degree rated their current overall health as excellent or very good, compared to only 44% of those with no post-secondary education. Lumina's Vice President of Impact and Planning stated "Looking across multiple variables and all aspects of life, you see overwhelming support that education beyond high school is absolutely worth it. The more education you have, the better life, better job that you're likely to have" (Alonso, 2023, para. 4).

Theoretical Perspectives and Retention Models

Researchers have created several theories and models to explain student retention in higher education. The theories and models outlined in this section provide historical insight that connects back to orientation programming. For university leadership and orientation teams to effectively create and implement programs that meet student needs and achieve university goals, they must have a deep understanding of both historical and contemporary student development theories.

At the center of these studies are factors that impact the student's ability to continue or leave college to better predict which students are most likely to drop out (J. P. Bean, 1980). The most prominent and commonly used models of institutional influences, according to Porter (1990), are attributed to Tinto's academic and social integration model and Bean's model of Student Departure. New research and predictive models regarding student departure have emerged with a greater focus on internal factors corresponding to the student's involvement within the institution. Rabelo and Zárate (2024) considered information about the admission process, personal factors (lack of adaptation, problems with classmates, enrollment profile),

pedagogical proposal, financial difficulties, class attendance, and scholar performance, among others when creating an ensemble predictive model for student departure. Table 2.1 outlines the key aspects of each theory and model in chronological order of development.

Tinto's Theory for Student Departure

Vincent Tinto (1975, 1994, 2006) developed an interactionalist theory for student departure by expanding Spady's (1970) work on the application of a suicide theory. Tinto's model focuses on the interaction between the students and their environment, specifically the academic and social systems of the institution (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). The characteristics students have as they enter college (i.e. family socioeconomic status, first-generation status, academic ability, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, financial status, college readiness) can affect a student's decision to stay or depart their university (Tinto, 1994). These personal attributes, some of which the student has no control over, coupled with the students' commitment to their personal goals of attending post-secondary education have affected the student's integration into the social and academic environments of the campus.

Two main retention factors are pointed out in Tinto's (1975, 1994) model of student persistence: social integration and academic integration. Wolcott (2006) outlined social integration as the degree to which students "adapt to the social atmosphere of the campus including life outside the classroom, maintaining family and peer relationships, and being involved in co-curricular activities" (p.13). Academic integration was defined as "a concern for the formal education of students in the classroom and interaction with faculty" (p. 13). There is a lower likelihood of voluntary withdrawal from an institution when both academic and social integration levels are higher, leading to an overall increase in institutional commitment. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986) maintained that "when other factors are held constant,

the stronger the individual's level of social and academic integration, the greater the student's subsequent commitment to the institution and to the goal of college graduation" (p. 155).

The model developed by Tinto suggests that the dropout process is one that is longitudinal, when in actuality, the process may involve reevaluating degrees of commitment to the coursework and institution semester to semester (Nicoletti, 2019). Over time, Tinto's model has been found to be general and difficult to implement in specific real-world situations. It is important to note when discussing sense of belonging, how the development of technology has created a new way to foster connection that was not a part of the equation for Tinto's model. Nicoletti (2019) suggested that the way young people interact, organize as groups, search for information, socialize and work via the use of technology changes the way communities are developed and sustained. These developments now play a much larger role in the equation surrounding student departure. A copy of Tinto's longitudinal model of institutional departure is provided in Appendix C.

Bean's Model of Student Departure

Based on research related to organizational structure and organizational behavior, Bean (J. P. Bean, 1980) created a model of student departure. Focused on college student retention, the model was adapted from a model exploring employee departure in a work organization. The combination of variables related to satisfaction and the decision to leave college was found to be similar to that of employee departure in the workplace. The model outlines exogenous variables that play a role in the drop out decision. The three groups of variables are categorized as Academic Factors (Pre-matriculation, Academic Performance, Academic Integration), Social-Psychological Factors (Goals, Utility, Alienation, Faculty contact, Social Life), and Environmental Factors (Finances, Opportunity to Transfer, Outside Friends) (Nicoletti, 2019).

The likelihood of departure is determined by the student's level of satisfaction with their institution in connection with the student's overall commitment to the institution (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). Bean presented a revised model of students' departure and concluded that students' peers played an important role in socialization while informal faculty contact played less of a role. Students played a more active role in their socialization than previously thought and the letter grades achieved seemed more the product of selection than socialization. A copy of Bean's Model of Student Departure is provided in Appendix D.

Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model of College Student Retention

Bean and Eaton (2001) developed a model of student departure that combines various psychological theories. The model's foundation was connected to social and academic integration. A student's interaction with the college environment was influenced by their characteristics and background. The student's experience within the environment affected their motivation for success. Central to this model were components of individual attitude, coping ability, self-efficacy, and internal values (J. Bean & Eaton, 2001). The outputs of the model were described as academic and social integration, institutional fit and loyalty, intent to persist, and persistence (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). Programs supported by this model include service-learning, freshman interest groups or learning communities, freshman orientation programs, and mentoring experiences. A copy of Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model is provided in Appendix E.

Kerby's New Model for Retention

Kerby (2015) built upon the models discussed above and developed a new predictive path for current and future retention efforts in higher education. This model considers the causal effects between contemporary external (exogenous) factors and multifaceted internal

(endogenous) factors to form constructs that accurately test and measure the causal relationship within the overall model. The proposed model, depicted in Appendix F, is an expansion of the models proposed by Tinto (1975), Spady, and Bean (1980). This innovative approach expands upon the foundational retention models while introducing two main differences that enhance its applicability: the incorporation of current socio-economic variables and the emphasis on individualized student experiences.

First, the new model considers the national and educational climate independently from other factors in the model while accounting for their direct influence on environmental and sociocultural factors as well as students' educational and career goals (Kerby, 2015). The second addition to previous works is the concept that adaptation to internal factors culminates into a notice of a sense of place. Kerby (2015) stated that institutions that effectively create retention programs that consider sense of place as an outcome of adaptation can contribute to positive individual intellectual development as well. The importance of social groups within the university community and their relationship with academic success and persistence in higher education is a noted expansion within Kerby's new model. A student's development of sense of place is highly related to their interactions with the institutional climate and culture and is directly associated with dropout decisions (Kerby, 2015). When developing programming to increase retention rates, it is essential to understand that social influence, change, and norms occur both within and outside of the social structure of higher education institutions. External forces play a key role in student retention, some of which universities have little control over. Consideration of external factors in creating internal structures that are congruent with adaptation leads to the development of sense of place and directly affects dropout decisions (Kerby, 2015).

Rabelo and Zárate Dropout Predictive Model

Rabelo and Zárate (2024) focused on analytical modeling to help predict undergraduate student dropout. An *ensemble* method is utilized because it uses techniques that allow the measurement of the most important features and their impact on student dropout. The model was obtained through a knowledge discovery in the database process starting from the comprehension of the problem domain. The proposed *ensemble* model outlines four stages to create the holistic prediction; 1) understanding the problem; 2) conceptual selection of attributes; 3) preprocessing and preparation of data subset; and 4) predictive modeling and interpretability of results (Rabelo & Zárate, 2024). These stages were applied to build the prediction model for higher education student dropout, which is shown in Appendix G. This proactive approach, which is not limited to just identifying dropouts but also considers potential dropouts, allows institutions to implement personalized intervention strategies (Rabelo & Zárate, 2024). Unlike the above models focused on student development theory, Rabelo and Zárate (2024) used university data to create a useful dropout model that is institution-specific. This model can be utilized for any grade level and is not solely focused on the first-year student. This predictive modeling method can assist universities in creating a roadmap to update policies, programs, and practices that impact student dropout with the goal of increasing overall retention.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's transition theory is designed to better understand and assist young adults as they move in, through and out of a transitional period. The theory provides a systematic way to predict, measure, and assist people's reactions to change. The model is situated around the four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies which are utilized to assess a student's ability to cope with transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The transition to a four-year university would be categorized as an anticipated transition. Orientation, as an onboarding experience, is a known concept

because it is typically a program all students are required to attend, but the components that make up the event are a bit unknown to students and their families.

Some critics believe that the model speaks in terms of stages and not a wholistic view of the individual. Schlossberg frames the model to include understanding a transition, coping with the transition and applying the model to real world-life transitions (Schlossberg, 2011).

Schlossberg's transitional theory is depicted in Appendix H.

Table 2.1 Timeline of Theoretical Perspectives & Retention Models

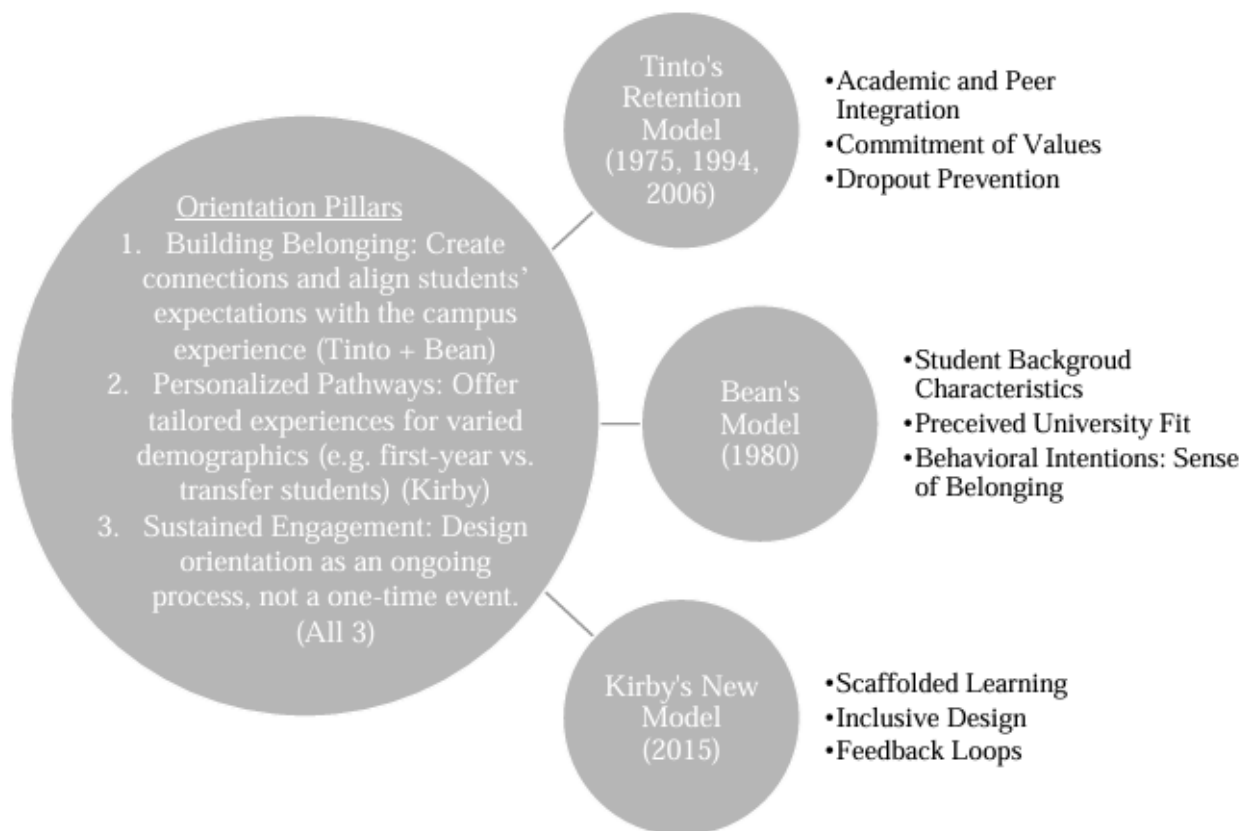
Year	Theory/Model	Key Concepts
1975, 1994, 2006	Tinto's Theory for Student Departure	- Interaction between student and their environment - Social integration and Academic integration
1980	Bean's Model of Student Departure	- Based on a model exploring employee departure in a work organization - Outlines variables: Academic, Psychological, Environmental
2001	Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model of College Student Retention	- Foundation connected to social and academic integration
2011	Schlossberg's Transitional Theory	- Systematic way to predict, measure, and assist reactions to change - Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies
2015	Kerby's New Model for Retention	- Expansion of models by Tinto (1975), Spady, and Bean (1980) - Considers national and education climate independently - Concept of adaptation to internal factors and sense of place
2024	Rabelo and Zárate Dropout Predictive Model	- Analytical modeling to predict undergraduate student dropout - Proactive approach using data for personalized intervention strategies

Theoretical Framework

The above theoretical frameworks and models offer valuable guidance for the design and implementation of orientation programs, highlighting essential components that can effectively

enhance student retention and improve academic outcomes for first-year students. A concept map is depicted in Figure 1 which provides a visualization to the components that lead to a strong orientation program.

Figure 1 Integrative Frameworks for Enhancing Orientation Programs



Retention Today

The decision to stay at an institution, move to another university, or leave post-secondary education altogether may consist of multiple factors. Some components connected to retention are associated with the university while others may be issues outside of university control. By focusing on individual student needs and students' unique university experiences, higher retention rates can be achieved (Rinn, 2022). Orientation is utilized as a transitional program to

help students onboard to an institution. By revitalizing traditional programming to prioritize student needs, orientation programs can significantly enhance retention rates.

The pandemic accelerated the need for flexibility and transparency that had not always existed in higher education (Salesforce, 2024b). One simple way to meet the needs of students is to offer flexibility and accessibility. This may look like virtual courses, online advising appointments, evening and weekend offerings of courses or programs as well as telehealth wellness checkups (Chandra, 2021). Flexibility enables students to balance their education with other responsibilities, including work, family care, and involvement. Offering flexible options that place students in the driver's seat sends a vital message to all future and current students, “You Fit Here” (Tandet, 2023).

One specific retention factor with particular importance is financial well-being. When asked, “What resources do you need from your university to be successful as a student?” 40% of students responded by stating that they needed “more financial aid” (Salesforce, 2024a). This number increased by six percent from the prior year. More support from institutional finance offices does include actual funding via scholarships, grants, and loans but also incorporates assistance in navigating the complexities of financing an education. A financial stress study found that first-year students experience higher financial stress levels compared to other students (Britt et al., 2015). Programs and resources that are designed to help students understand their financial undertaking, create a personal budget, clear notifications and follow up if something is wrong with their financial account are a few ways universities can reduce financial stress (Britt et al., 2015). If institutions offer such programs, students and their support network should be informed of the resources soon after admittance and throughout the onboarding process.

To effectively center the student, institutions should communicate their student support services through multiple platforms including websites, social media, in-person events like orientation, as well as email campaigns. The more chances universities give students to find and leverage campus resources, the more the services will be utilized which supports retention efforts (Tandet, 2023). Often higher education departments work independently from one another, requiring students to individually navigate programs and processes to find answers. This model causes frustration among students who may need simple assistance but are pointed in different directions across campus. To create greater harmony in the student journey, the one-stop model was created (Mowreader, 2023). A one-stop is a way to combine offices and share data to provide students a clearer journey through the institution. Instead of visiting several different offices, students are provided with one location to address a variety of their needs. A survey conducted by Inside Higher Ed and College Pulse in 2022 found students' satisfaction with enrollment and financial aid office interactions was generally higher if their college had a one-stop shop for student services (Ezarik, 2022). Creating a one-stop shop eliminates barriers of access for students seeking help from their institution. If students can easily find resources, create connections, and can focus on their academic and personal success their likelihood of returning semester after semester is increased.

Student Retention Versus Persistence

Student retention and persistence are two common terms used to discuss university and student success, but they are not interchangeable. Retention focuses on the action and strategies employed by institutions to keep students enrolled, while persistence emphasizes the efforts and mindset of students to preserve despite expected and unexpected challenges as explained by the National Clearinghouse (National Student Clearinghouse, 2023). Put another way, retention

measures an institution's success and persistence measures a student's (Tandet, 2023). A student who transfers to another institution has persisted in their studies but they have not been retained by their starting college or university. Retention is driven by the university's actions and is a top-down metric focused on a cohort of students; whereas, persistence is driven by the student's choices and is a bottom-up metric focused on the individual (Suitable, n.d.). Institutions that prioritize persistence strategies can positively influence student retention and vice versa (Tandet, 2023).

Though student persistence is ultimately in the hands of the students themselves, there are several things higher education institutions can do to prioritize the individual student to assist in increasing retention. Four main factors influencing college retention outlined by Kristina Ericksen of Collegis Education (2022) include consistent student experiences, meeting students where they are, utilizing simple but effective tools, and building a sense of community belonging amongst students. Similarly, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2020) identified a sense of community, inconsistent experiences, complex tools, and lack of support as key factors influencing student retention. By understanding these areas, which positively and negatively impact student retention, universities can focus on providing intentional and consistent student-focused strategies to increase retention rates. An intentional and consistent approach to student retention requires institutions to meet students where they are and deliver resources precisely when they are needed—an approach commonly referred to as "just-in-time" support.(Ericksen, 2022).

Students have immediate access to endless pieces of information via the web; they expect their university resources to work similarly (Bariuad, 2022). Timing and accessibility are keys to making resources convenient and effective for the students who use them. Universities must

ensure a student's perspective is included when developing future policies, procedures, and resource development, while spending less time deciding what works best for university administration. Higher education can have an air of sophistication and complicated processes that make campuses less accessible. Coupled with “just-in-time” experiences, students desire straightforward programs and tools that make information accessible and simple (Clope, 2022). Universities need to focus more on how they can create simple, direct paths to greater student success and increased retention. Students want to see themselves reflected in the campus community and strive to build connections with those around them. A welcoming, supportive community encourages students to make friends and to find their sense of place among the many. A sense of care is critical in terms of support from advisors, faculty, and support staff on campus that can help identify challenges and provide solutions before they become overwhelming (DeAngelo et al., 2016). Many universities have strategic initiatives written to grow enrollment and increase retention rates. As task forces form, conversations are had, and plans are developed on how to achieve the goals set, university leaders must lean on relevant data and practices to ensure they are meeting the needs of students today and of those to come. These components are critical in the creation of a successful orientation program. However, with so many program goals and student expectations, the design and execution can be overwhelming.

Academic Achievement Predictors

Attending post-secondary education is about achieving academic goals and gaining new knowledge. More specifically, the goal for those seeking a bachelor’s degree is to graduate. Many studies have been conducted to better understand the influence academic performance has on retention (Stewart et al., 2015). In their book *How college affects students: a third decade of research*, Pascarella and Terenini (2025) found college grades to be one of the most consistent

predictors of student persistence and degree completion. EAB found a strong correlation between first-year Grade Point Average (GPA) achieved and graduation rates (Venit, 2014). 43% of students at a public Midwest flagship were a part of what EAB calls the “Murky Middle,” achieving between a 2.2 and 3.0 GPA. A greater decline in graduation rates begins to appear for students who earn just below a B average (Venit, 2014). This is a large population of students who may benefit from earlier interventions to assist in increasing graduation rates. The difference in two-tenths of GPA (the equivalent of improving just two letter grades for a full-time first-year student) correlates with a graduation rate increase of as much as 10% (Venit, 2014). The National Student Clearinghouse provided nationwide insights regarding leading predictors for retention and graduation rates among first-time students, and first-year GPA was the strongest predictor for bachelor’s degree seekers (National Student Clearinghouse, 2024).

Credit accumulation, gateway course completion, and high credit completion rates are all key indicators of degree completion. University leaders must understand barriers that may exist in these key areas to ensure students do not stop out and are able to graduate in a timely manner (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2020). Full-time student status is marked by completing 12 credit hours per semester. However, a study conducted by Belfield, Jenkins, and Lahr (2016) found that full-time students who complete at least 15 credits in their first semester (30 in the first year) are 19% more likely to complete their four-year degree than those who take only 12 credits in their first semester (24 in the first year). Increased credit enrollment can offer significant economic advantages for the students, as the cost per credit hour may decrease or be capped once a specific credit threshold is reached. Among all first-year, degree-seeking students in the 2019-2020 Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) cohort, students earned roughly 75% of the credits they attempted (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). Only 51.2% of full-time

students within the cohort earned 24 or more credit hours during their first year of study. Furthermore, less than a third of full-time students (27.5%) earned 30 or more credit hours (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). Higher education institutions need to focus on maximizing students' course completion rates and providing guidance via strong advising experiences to ensure students surpass important credit-hour thresholds in their first year of study (Alzen et al., 2021).

Orientation Programs

Orientation programs, defined by Wood (2022) in *What to Expect at College Orientation*, are any effort on the part of an institution to give incoming students a chance to explore campus, to connect with peers, and to learn about valuable resources. Such programs have a longstanding history on college campuses in terms of onboarding new students to an institution of post-secondary learning. The history of orientation programs in the United States is virtually as old as the history of the country's colleges and universities. Institutions of higher learning have implemented orientation programming or a similar experience to provide support and assistance to the incoming freshman class for over 100 years (Daddona & Cooper, 2002). Boston University is credited with organizing the first orientation program in 1888 to acquaint new students with college life, and the University of Maine is credited with hosting the first freshman week in 1923 (Ward-Roof, 2010). By 1925, over twenty-five colleges throughout the nation had such programs (*History*, 2024). The overall role of orientation has shifted from purely being academically focused to assisting in the overall student transition emotionally, academically, financially, and socially. Orientation has evolved into a final stage of admission with a heightened focus on the retention of new students (*History*, 2024). Over time, American higher education has become more complex, and student populations continue to grow in diversity.

Orientation programs should be designed to match the unique needs of the student population in easing the overall transition to college and create a foundation to ensure academic success in college (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984).

Purpose of Orientation Programs

The mission of orientation programs has changed significantly from programs focused primarily on the transactional components of the enrollment process such as course registration, or housing placement to centering programming around the needs of new students and families (Capps & Miller, 2006). Higher education institutions across the country utilize orientation programming as a bridge between secondary and post-secondary experiences. Throughout the literature, orientation is defined as an opportunity to promote student success through structured experiences built to engage new members of a community and to provide access to resources for success (Lehning, 2008). There are several different definitions of college orientation, but they all contain similar components: learning resources, attending social events, getting connected with other new students, and feeling prepared to start the first semester (Teachmint, 2021).

While most institutions have a shared mission of creating a structured transition into the higher education landscape, the approach to orientation delivery can drastically differ.

Orientation programs may consist of advising appointments, small group activities, overnight stays, lecture-style sessions, or online components. Additionally, institutions may offer extended orientation experiences, outdoor excursions, and travel into their onboarding experiences to enhance the orientation program. A university's mission, size, type, and location all play a factor in deciding how to offer orientation programs. Depending on the type, size, and mission of the institution, orientation programs have been shown to take a multitude of approaches in meeting institutional objectives and assisting students (Daddona & Cooper, 2002).

Orientation Structure

The overall structure of an orientation program varies from campus to campus. New students embarking on their higher education journey may experience required or optional programs hosted on-campus or virtually. Programs may be one-day or multiple-day, overnight experiences (Wood, 2022). Universities may host additional experiences including extended orientations, welcome week activities, enrollment seminars, and first-year courses, all geared toward the onboarding of new students (Nelson, 2017).

Regardless of the structure or modality, most orientation programs have a similar degree of organization. According to Upcraft and Farnsworth (1984), orientation can be divided into three phases: pre-enrollment, initial enrollment, and the rest of the first year. Institutions must provide information and programs before students enroll, leading up to their first semester, during the first few days on the campus, and throughout the first year of enrollment. Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, many universities replicated their orientation programs year after year with minimal changes to the format and modality. Since the disruption of the Pandemic in 2020, universities have been required to shift perspectives and programming to better match the needs of the learners they are onboarding (Fischer, 2022).

Orientation Modality

Virtual or online orientation programs were scarcely offered before the COVID-19 Pandemic. Many higher education institutions had no choice but to move orientation components to an online platform in 2020. The shift to virtual orientations opened a new door of opportunities to connect with students and bring the onboarding experience to them. Though many institutions have resumed in-person experiences, it may be beneficial for schools to maintain an online component of their orientation programs (Carter et al., 2020). There are

several benefits to providing an online orientation program: convenience for students, affordability for students and the institution, the opportunity to tailor information to specific populations, and accessibility from anywhere. Online orientations allow a student to complete the content wherever and whenever works best for them. They can intake the new, personalized information at a pace that best suits their needs (Crozier, 2021).

However, there are some challenges and drawbacks to online orientation programs. Creating online content requires a specific skill set geared to online learning. Taking an in-person program and formatting it into a virtual platform will not result in the same outcomes. Many institutions have moved to outsource their online orientations to companies that have the knowledge and tools to develop audio, graphics, video, screencasting, and digital accessibility all with an underlying understanding of IT (Advantage Design Group, 2023). Though institutions are gaining a well-designed platform, outsourcing online orientations can lack personalization and may feel disingenuous to the student. Dumford and Miller (2018) utilized the National Survey of Student Engagement data to explore ways in which taking online courses impacted student engagement for first-year students. The study found online students were less likely to engage in collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, and discussions with diverse others, compared to their more traditional classroom counterparts (Dumford & Miller, 2018). As stated above, creating a sense of belonging is imperative to student success and retention. Online modalities, if not structured well, may limit students' ability to create community and an overall sense of belonging. Depending on how the online orientation program is created, there is less opportunity for peer-to-peer connection compared to an in-person program. Online orientation programs rarely help students make connections with other students, like an orientation leader, and they do not help connect students directly with university staff for assistance and to answer

questions (Crozier, 2021). Lastly, online orientation programs put the responsibility of completion on the student. Unlike in-person programming where students are assisted throughout their experience, online orientation programs put the student in control of both completing the program and seeking help when needed. When developing online programming and content, orientation leadership must remember the importance of student engagement and the correlation it has to student's sense of belonging.

Hale and Buzas (2014) researched the components students found most valuable in an online orientation, specifically at Washtenaw Community College. One major theme suggested that students found greater value in aspects of the course that included interactive components. One participant stated that the interactive components, including quizzes, increased their retention of the materials presented (Hale & Buzas, 2014). Another overarching theme demonstrated that students recognize and appreciate having a custom experience. Students wanted to have more of an individualized experience based on personal interests or academic areas of study. Students valued engaging media, like videos or games that provided personalization to their needs (Hale & Buzas, 2014). The researchers suggest that online orientations should include simple navigation and allow students to work at their own pace and pick up where they left off. The design of the online experience should incorporate videos, avatars, and games to increase levels of engagement. Institutions have a unique opportunity to develop and refine online orientation as another means to help students successfully transition to college (Hale & Buzas, 2014).

In a study conducted by Chan (2017) reviewing 100 community colleges, 46% offered in-person new student orientation programming, 21% offered online-only, 18% offered both in-person and online programs, and 15% provided limited or no information about their orientation

offerings. The length of time required to complete, the topics covered, the platforms or media components utilized, along with final assessment tools offered varied greatly among all the online orientations found. The study revealed that web-based online orientation programs were likely to incorporate too much information and relied heavily on text-based content (Chan, 2017). When creating an online orientation, it is important to pair content with engaging components so that students stay invested in the course and retain the information covered.

Standards of Orientation Programming

There is not a normative, one-size-fits-all model of student orientation that would lead to orientation programs occurring the same way across all campuses and student populations. There is, however, a shared set of expectations, aims, considerations, and qualities for orientation program professionals that may vary with shifting contexts and concerns (A. L. Patton, 2017). Two national organizations that address best practices and standards for student orientation work are the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and the Association for Orientation, Transition, Retention in Higher Education (formerly NODA, National Orientation Directors Association).

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has been the pre-eminent force for promoting standards in student affairs, student services, and student development programs since its inception in 1979. CAS has developed 50 functional area standards and 3 cross-functional frameworks for higher education programs and services (*Standards*, 2023). New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) is one of the 50 functional areas for which CAS has created specific standards. The CAS New Student Orientation Programs standards and guidelines have utility for national and international institutions and provide

criteria by which to evaluate the quality, effectiveness, and appropriateness of orientation programs (*New Student Orientation Programs: CAS Standards and Guidelines*, 2023).

Orientation administrators can utilize the NSOP CAS standards as a tool to assist in developing program outcomes, hiring student staff, designing orientation experiences, creating evaluations, and more. A copy of the NSOP CAS standards is provided in Appendix I.

Orientation, Transition, and Retention (NODA)

The most established professional organization specifically founded for orientation professions is the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA). Founded in 1976, NODA was created to bring orientation leaders together to share ideas, definitions, and practices in regard to orientation programs (*History*, 2024). Today, NODA is an international association comprised of professional administrators, students, faculty, and related organizations. The organization strives to create a community of practice that defines and enriches the fields of orientation, transition, and retention.

Orientation Impacts on Student Success and Retention

According to Ramist (1981), the orientation program is considered a necessary good start for students starting their higher education journey. It takes on an especially important role in retaining students by helping them make the most of their college experience (Ramist, 1981). Numerous research studies have been conducted over the past several decades that showcase the impact orientation programming can have on student retention, specifically for first-year, traditional-aged students. In the review of the literature, it is clear that some form of orientation programming positively impacts first-year retention (Chan, 2017; Chasteen, 2005; Glass Jr. & Garrett, 1995; Lehning, 2008; Pascarella et al., 1986; Yang, 2001). King and Wessell (2004) reported that effective orientation programs positively contribute to matriculation, retention, and

enrollment management of institutions. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe's (1986) research showcased that attending orientation had an impact not just on retention but also on student social integration and commitment to the institution, which are two key factors in Tinto's model of student departure (Tinto, 1975). Most research studies have looked at the academic success and retention of students who have completed some form of orientation programming (extended orientation, onboarding course, summer orientation program, etc.) compared to those who did not participate in the experience (Chasteen, 2005; Davis, 2013; Glass Jr. & Garrett, 1995; Lehning, 2008).

Yang (2001) compared the outcomes of two different types of freshman orientation programs offered at Fresno City College, a California Community College. Yang (2001) focused on academic achievement, continuous full-time enrollment, and retention from first to second semester, comparing students participating in the Summer Readiness program to those in the Guidance Studies program. The Summer Readiness program offered a more intense three-week summer orientation program; whereas, the Guidance Studies program offered specific courses for the first semester of freshman year to assist in the overall transition to college. In that study, the Summer Readiness participants achieved better grades by the end of the fall semester compared to those taking Guidance Studies courses. The Summer Readiness students were also enrolled in more credit hours at the end of the fall than their counterparts (Yang, 2001). Based on the findings, students immersed in the three-week program were able to focus strictly on their college transition compared to students taking fall classes alongside their Guidance Studies course. Providing a program built to ease the transition to college allowed students in the Summer Readiness program to apply their knowledge during their first semester which in turn increased their academic achievement.

Generation Z

Orientation programs have been around for more than 100 years providing information and resources to new students to ease their transition into higher education. Leadership within orientation programs may have extensive knowledge and expertise in terms of programming and implementation of orientation experiences, but the onboarding of Generation Z is different than any other student population. Generation Z is typically defined as those born from the mid-to-late 1990s to the early 2010s. This group is often referred to as the post-millennial, iGeneration, and digital natives (Dimock, 2019). Generation Z is the most diverse generation in American history (*Gen Z*, 2022). Generation Z stands out from other generations in at least one aspect that these cohorts have never seen, the world without the Internet (Chillakuri, 2020). The importance of orientation programs in terms of retention and persistence remains, but the content delivery must match the expectations of the students entering higher education.

Generation Z and Higher Education

A majority of Generations Z (83%) in the U.S. say that a college education today is “very important” or “fairly important,” according to data from the Gallup and Walton Family Foundation-State of American Youth Survey (Nicola, 2023). Though students state that higher education is important, lower numbers of students are attending college after high school graduation. From 2019 to 2022, undergraduate college enrollment dropped by 8% nationwide (Binkley, 2023). A larger number of students are interested in taking a gap year between high school and college compared to past years and may use the time to gain job experience, to travel, and/or to prepare for post-secondary education (“Gen Z Might Be Changing Their Mind About Going to College,” 2023). Affordability and cost of attendance remain a top concern for students wanting to attend college (Nicola, 2023). Though the overall number of traditional-aged students

is declining, most new, incoming students into higher education continue to be Generation Z as their age ranges from 12 to 27 years old.

Onboarding of Gen Z

During the college search process, Generation Z students are looking for a clear understanding of the institution's values, strategic goals, and social impact (Fratricova & Kirchmayer, 2018). The onboarding of these students needs to instill the message and ensure that students connect with the values, ethics, and mission through orientation programming (Chillakuri, 2020). The value of a college degree from the Generation Z perspective is not simply about obtaining a job after graduation but focuses on the betterment of themselves, their connections to others, and the impact they will have on society. Orientation leadership must understand the key factors that are important to Generation Z to best create and implement an onboarding experience that will resonate with this population.

As stated above, this generation of students has grown up in a world saturated with technology, particularly smartphones and social media. The use of handheld technology has shaped student's communication styles, learning preferences, and social interactions both inside and outside of a school setting (Schukei, 2020). With the world virtually at their fingertips, Gen Z students experience a more diverse world in addition to being the most diverse generation yet. In addition to having access to a more diverse world online, many of these students have been raised in or around multicultural environments (Igielnik & Parker, 2020). Much like Millennials, Gen Z advocates for inclusive policies, representation, and social justice initiatives within their communities and would look for similar aspects in their campus communities (Igielnik & Parker, 2019). Generation Z is looking for a practical and impactful education that translates into skills and career opportunities. If the content is not seen as important or creates little impact, students

simply tune it out. Students are seeking experiences that provide real-world relevance. Both hard and soft skills are of importance to Generation Z students as they understand the impact of incorporating them into their professional and personal life. Lastly, Generation Z understands the importance of taking care of their mental health. The increase in social media use coupled with heightened academic pressure, has been linked to higher rates of depression among this generation (Schukei, 2020). This generation of students advocate for accessible mental health resources and are active in destigmatizing mental wellness that promoting better overall health.

University leaders can create improved onboarding practices by better understanding those who will be onboarding. Unlike the past, students are not interested in learning where a resource may be located on campus or how to pay their student bill. This information can be accessed in the palm of their hand. Students instead are seeking opportunities to connect with their peers, understand the values of the institution, feel supported and valued, and create a sense of belonging. The delivery of this information can also take on new formats to better resonate with Gen Z students. Virtual experiences, short videos, and peer-to-peer connections are a few ways leaders within orientation practices can meet their students where they are.

Generation Alpha

Most students attending higher education today are known as Generation Z. But soon, Generation Alpha, students born between 2010 and 2024, will be entering higher education (Trovato, 2024). This up-and-coming generation of students is the first to be born entirely in the 21st century. 2010 is the year the iPad was launched, Instagram was released, and ‘App’ was announced as the word of the year (terminalfour, 2024)! This generation has been surrounded by technological advances throughout their entire lives. These students will bring expectations for immersive, personalized, and tech-driven learning (Salehi, 2025). When university leaders think

about the needs of the next generation, a strong focus grounded in technology will be an expectation of the students entering. New opportunities for onboarding students to post-secondary education may be required to assist in overall student success. Orientation leadership must prioritize crafting personalized onboarding experiences, embracing cutting-edge digital environments, seizing virtual opportunities, and offering a wide array of flexible options to meet the needs of the next generation.

“Just-in-Time” Learning

Generation Z is great at researching and finding information on their own, typically aided by technology. This group of students is used to fast-moving information and immediate gratification (O’Brien, 2018). Orientation programming must meet the needs of this generation of students and their learning styles by including bite-sized learning, flexibility, and content relevancy or “just-in-time” learning (*Gen Z*, 2022). Just-in-time learning experiences refer to the practice of acquiring knowledge or skills precisely when they are needed, rather than through traditional methods of long-term study or structured programming. These experiences are often characterized by their immediacy and relevance to a specific task or problem at hand (Clope, 2022). Advantages of just-in-time learning include flexibility, efficiency, and relevance. Additionally, just-in-time learning can be more time-efficient, as individuals focus only on what they need to know at a given moment in time. Orientation experiences that utilize just-in-time learning practices offer a dynamic and practical alternative to less intentional orientation models, enabling individuals to acquire knowledge and resources at a targeted time in a specific setting.

Too often, orientation is seen as a brief, one-time event. The amount of information and type of experience that new students need during their transition can be overwhelming and an anxiety-producing day-and-a-half (A. L. Patton, 2017). It is highly unlikely that in this short time

students can absorb everything they need to be successful, meet and become comfortable with faculty and staff, make new friends, and develop a connection with their new institution. Orientation must be appropriately timed and sequenced from the pre-enrollment period, through the entering period, to the post-entering period (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). Too often, orientation planners overwhelm students with anything and everything they might need to know. As a result, colleges may offer extended orientation programs, welcome weeks, convocations, and first-year seminars. Upcraft and Farnsworth (1984) understand that orientation planners must not only decide what entering students need to know, but when they need to know it and in what dosages. Deciding what to do before students enroll, while they enroll, and after they enroll should be based on their readiness to receive information. By utilizing just-in-time strategies, college orientation programs can segment the information students receive during the onboarding process into smaller, more manageable pieces to ease the transition process. Incorporating just-in-time learning strategies into orientation programming ensures that students receive timely and relevant information throughout their transition to college life. By addressing the unique needs and learning preferences of Generation Z, institutions can create a more meaningful and manageable onboarding experience, fostering student success and a stronger sense of belonging from the very beginning.

Summary

Retention of students during their time in higher education has been a focal point for U.S. institutions to ensure that students graduate. Higher education administration is always searching for best practices, new initiatives, and program enhancements that will increase student retention. Over the past several decades, an enhanced effort, including funding, has been put towards efforts to recruit and retain students (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). Specifically, retention from

first to second year has become increasingly important to institutions and the students they serve (Soika, 2020). With so many complex variables connected to a student's decision to depart or to stay enrolled, retention can be difficult to measure. Both the social and academic integration of first-year students has historically been a critical juncture in students' post-secondary experience. Works by Tinto (1975, 1994), Bean (1980), and Bean and Eaton (2001) provide important theoretical perspectives and models that are key in explaining student retention and persistence.

For the last century, orientation programs have been utilized to assist students in the onboarding and overall transition into higher education. Specific program offerings and activities may vary from institution to institution, but there is a common thread of goals to be achieved such as: student success, academic integration, social integration, and the development of realistic and shared expectations (OptimumHQ, 2024). Past research has shown that orientation programs can have an impact on students' academic and social integration, matriculation, retention, and graduation rates. Due to the diversity of programs, as well as the students in attendance, causation between specific orientation practices and variable impacts has been limited in the research. Orientation and onboarding experiences have numerous indirect impacts that assist in welcoming students into their new home while aiding them in becoming more aware, informed, and comfortable as they embark on their higher education journey.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Generation Z students are looking for universities that offer flexible modalities and a community that focuses on the betterment of their students. The Students from Gen Z want to ensure that their personal values, goals, and perspectives align with the institution they plan on attending. The onboarding experience needs to showcase the care, connection, and support that a student will experience throughout their time in college (Chillakuri, 2020). The Generation Z student of today has unlimited information at their

fingertips and expect their higher education experience to be just as accessible. Impactful content, flexible modalities, just-in-time delivery, and a community of care are all components a new student is seeking in their education and onboarding experience. Student expectations must be kept at the forefront as orientation programs are designed to successfully onboard and retain the students of tomorrow.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the research for this quantitative study. Included in this chapter are the purpose of study, research questions, the research design, data collection, analysis, the population, and potential limitations.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact a scaffolded approach, also known as “just-in-time” learning, to orientation and onboarding programs has on academic performance and retention for first year undergraduate students at a large, four-year, Research 1 institution. The quantitative study sought to identify differences in students' academic performance and retention at Louis Miles University who participated in the scaffolded programs with those who attended traditional orientation programming. This research also examined differences in academic performance comparing modality, in-person or virtual, for orientation programs. Academic performance was measured by grade point average (GPA) and credit completion rates (CCR) at the end of both the first and second semesters of the first-year experience. Retention was measured by persistence to the sophomore year.

Research Questions

1. Are there significant differences in retention rates from the first to second year between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?
2. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?

3. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between those who attended in-person orientation programming compared to those who attended virtual programming?

Research Scope and Rationale

New student orientation is intended to serve all new incoming, undergraduate students. Many post-secondary institutions have some form of onboarding process, whether it be an overnight program, one-day experience, or extended summer program. More students are requesting a less-is-more approach, where connection and communication norms and values are stressed over large quantities of information that could easily overwhelm students (Flaherty, 2023). This is a shift from the traditional orientation programs that pack loads of information, including enrollment, into two or even one-day experiences months before students start classes. Maintaining some aspects of asynchronous elements introduced during the COVID-19 Pandemic coupled with in-person connections may allow for the best of both worlds. The goal of this study was not to focus on the program outline and content covered but instead to focus on the timing and modality of content delivery and how both relate to academic performance and retention. The findings of this research study offer universities valuable insights into how intentional content delivery methods during onboarding processes can significantly influence students' academic performance, paving the way for more strategic and impactful approaches to student success.

Leading up to the first day of classes, new, first-time, first-year students may have mixed emotions about starting at a large, public, Research 1 university. Orientation programming may have many outcomes for both students and their families but overall, the goal is to ensure a

smooth transition into the college experience. Onboarding programs set the tone for new student success, facilitate a satisfactory transition from secondary to post-secondary education, and are critical to student retention. New student orientation programming is a time to explore, learn, and grow with other incoming students. Because they are delivered in many ways, orientation programs range from a few days to several months. The nature of orientation activities can vary from formal to informal, student-centered to institution-focused (Robinson et al., 1996).

Orientation can be associated with information overload. For many students the transition to higher education is difficult, but well-designed and scaffolded orientation programs can facilitate a smooth shift from high school to college (Upcraft et al., 2004). The relationships and experiences that students have in those first few days of arrival can significantly influence the academic and emotional direction of the students' upcoming semester. While much research has been conducted regarding the content and format of orientation, there is little known regarding the specific timeframe and modality of content delivery throughout orientation programs. This study sought to investigate the impact a scaffolded approach, also known as "just-in-time" learning, to orientation and onboarding programs has on academic performance and retention of first-time first-year students. Understanding how to proactively design and deliver content that is focused on the students and their overall success may create higher academic performance and retention for post-secondary institutions. In turn, this research will provide insights to higher education administrators related to ways orientation programming can positively contribute to student success, well-being, and retention.

Research Design

This study investigated the impact of a scaffolded approach for orientation and onboarding. The study examined whether there are differences between students at Louis Miles

University who participated in traditional orientation programs and those who participated in the “just-in-time” structure of orientation. Academic performance was measured by grade point average and credit completion rates at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience. Retention was measured by persistence to the sophomore year.

This study utilized a quasi-experimental non-equivalent comparison group design (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Because the design does not provide for full control of potential confounding variables, caution should be used to infer cause and effect. Independent variable manipulation was done via the type technique (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). With this manipulation, the two orientation program formats, traditional orientation programs and “just-in-time” orientation programs, were utilized to compare two different student populations. The researcher used predetermined first-year classes at Louis Miles University that started in the fall of 2018 and the fall of 2023.

Participants

Participants selected for this study were first-year, first-time undergraduate students at Louis Miles University from two specific academic cohorts, 2018-2019 (~3,300 students) and 2023-2024 (~3,000 students). First-year students are defined as students in their first semester at Louis Miles University without any prior post-secondary coursework at a different institution classified with a full-time enrollment status. Both domestic and international first-year students were included in the study. This study included first-year students transitioning to Louis Miles University straight from high school. For this study, transfer students and non-traditional students were excluded. Transfer students may have previous orientation experience and post-secondary knowledge that result in confounding variables in the study, skewing overall results. Louis Miles University also provides tailored programming during new student orientation for

the transfer student population. Non-traditional-aged first-year students start their college experience with varied past experiences that may result in confounding variables, skewing overall results. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, most components of a typical orientation program were turned upside down. Many experiences were hosted completely virtual for the safety of the students. Because of the outlying nature, data from the following academic years were not considered for this study: 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023.

Once approval to proceed was granted by the dissertation committee, an application was submitted to the Kansas State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approved, The Office of Recruitment and Admissions (ORA) provided the list of students who enrolled for the fall semesters listed above along with what modality students participated in, in-person or virtually. The Office of Data, Assessment, and Institutional Research along with the Office of Enrollment Management provided student grade point averages, credit completion, and retention information from the above fall and spring semesters.

Data from all subjects identified were combined into one data file. The participants' data were divided into two groups: data from students who participated in "just-in-time" orientation programming and that from those who participated in traditional programming. "Just-in-time" participants were grouped into one cohort, Group A. The comparison group, Group B, made up the second cohort of traditional program participants. Within the Group A dataset, additional information was outlined including orientation modality of virtual or in-person.

Data Collection

This quantitative study sought to provide descriptive data by comparing two groups of students with the use of university data. Data were provided by the Louis Miles University Office of Data, Assessment, and Institutional Research and included information regarding

cohort year and student record information (first-generation status, gender, multicultural, GPA, credit completion). Grade reports and enrollment information were both based on the 20th class day of each semester. Data were collected via new student orientation registration which outlined orientation modality completed for the 2023 cohort. All student data received were de-identified to ensure the privacy of student information.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis methods were used in this study. All data were compiled in Microsoft Excel and imported into SPSS for analysis. The participant groups, Group A and Group B, were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For the first research question (“Are there significant differences in retention rates from the first to second year between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?”) both the independent and dependent variables were categorical, so a Pearson’s chi-square was conducted for this analysis.

For the second research question (“Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?”), a one-way ANOVA test was conducted as the independent variable was categorical and the dependent variables were continuous.

For the third research question (“Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between those who attended “just-in-time” orientation programming in person compared to those who attended virtually?”), a one-way

ANOVA test was conducted as the independent variable was categorical and the dependent variables were continuous. Significance levels were set at the $p = 0.05$ level.

Summary

Through data collection and analysis, the differences in scaffolded and traditional orientation programs were depicted via student grade point average, credit completion rates, and first-to-second-year retention rates. This research will provide orientation leadership and higher education administrators with impactful insights regarding orientation program delivery, timing, and modality. Additionally, understanding what components positively contribute to student success, well-being, and retention can help guide orientation leadership when constructing their university programming. This study opens the door for further research focused on program delivery and the content of timing. Future researchers can concentrate on other subsets of onboarding students, including transfers, returning students, graduate students, and online learners.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Results

The impact of scaffolded orientation programming on student retention and academic achievement was the focus of this study. This study sought to identify significant differences in first-to-second-year retention rates and academic achievement among first-time freshmen by comparing traditional orientation programming with that of a scaffolded approach to onboarding. Additionally, the relationship between orientation modality, in-person versus virtual, and student retention and academic achievement was analyzed. The data analyses and results of this study are presented in this chapter. It includes the description of the sample, results of the various statistical analyses, and examination of the three research questions.

Description of the Sample

Participants selected for this study were first-year, first-time undergraduate students at Louis Miles University (LMU) from two specific academic cohorts, 2018-2019 (3,413 students) and 2023-2024 (3,124 students). The students selected included both domestic and international. De-identified student record data were obtained via LMU for all students who met the study criteria.

In total, 6,537 student records were utilized for the study. The 2018-2019 cohort consisted of 3,413 students, and the 2023-2024 cohort consisted of 3,124 students. Students identified as female (52.2%) and male (47.8%). 21.4% of the students were first-generation college students. Students were either from in-state (76.4%), out-of-state (22.0%), or international (1.6%). A full list of the demographic breakdown between the two cohorts is outlined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants by Orientation Program Format

Demographic Data of student records n=6537

	TRADITIONAL		SCAFFOLDED		TOTAL	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
GENDER						
Female	1729	50.7%	1681	53.8%	3410	52.2%
Male	1684	49.3%	1443	46.2%	3127	47.8%
FIRST GENERATION						
First Generation	754	22.1%	643	20.6	1397	21.4%
Not First Generation	2659	77.9%	2481	79.4%	5140	78.6%
RESIDENCY						
In-State	2715	79.5%	2281	73.0%	4996	76.4%
Out-of-State	623	18.3%	814	26.1%	1437	22.0%
International	75	2.2%	29	0.9%	104	1.6%
ETHNICITY						
Under-Represented Minority (URM)	510	14.9%	504	16.1%	1014	15.5%
Non-URM	2903	85.1%	2620	83.9%	5523	84.5%

Analysis of Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact a scaffolded approach, also known as “just-in-time” learning, to orientation and onboarding programs had on academic performance and retention for first-year undergraduate students at a large, four-year, Research 1 institution. Specifically, the study was designed to investigate the following research questions.

1. Are there significant differences in retention rates from the first to second year between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?
2. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?
3. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between those who attended in-person orientation programming compared to those who attended virtual programming?

Research Question 1

Research question one focused on the difference that might exist in the retention from first-year to second-year based on the orientation program attended, traditional (2018-2019), or scaffolded (2023-2024). A Pearsons chi-square test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between orientation program cohort and retention from first to second year as both variables were categorical. The relation between the variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 6,537) = .070, p=.792$, Cramer’s V = .003. Table 4.2 details the descriptive

statistics of the participants based on the orientation format attended and retention from the first to second year.

Table 4.2 Frequencies of Retention Status by Orientation Program Format

	Not Retained	Retained
Scaffolded		
Count	452	2672
% within Orientation Cohort Student was part of	14.5%	85.5%
Traditional		
Count	486	2927
% within Orientation Cohort Student was part of	14.2%	85.8%

Research Question 2

The second research question explored the possible difference between the grade point average (GPA) achieved and credit completion rates (CCR) after the first and second semesters based on the orientation program attended, traditional (2018-2019), or scaffolded (2023-2024). A one-way ANOVA was conducted for each semester to appropriately determine if there were any statistically significant differences between orientation program cohorts. A Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variance was conducted to examine the assumption of similar distributions within the various groups. A more robust F test was conducted when homogeneity of variance assumption was violated.

When looking at cumulative GPA achieved by students at the end of the fall and spring semester, there was a statistically significant difference between those who attended traditional and scaffolded orientation programming. Specifically, students who attended the scaffolded

orientation programs (M=3.19, SD=.83) achieved significantly higher fall cumulative GPAs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programming (M=3.14, SD=.83) with a small effect, $F(1, 6395) = 5.60$, $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .001$.

Students who attended the scaffolded orientation program (M=3.26, SD=.69) achieved significantly higher spring cumulative GPAs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programming (M=3.15, SD=.75) with a small effect, Welch's $F(1, 6050.645) = 37.185$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .006$. Table 4.3 details the descriptive statistics of the participants based on the orientation format and cumulative GPA achieved after the fall and spring semesters.

Table 4.3 Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance for Cumulative GPA by Orientation Program Format

	Cohort	N	Mean	SD
Fall Cumulative GPA	Scaffolded	3055	3.18644	.830565
	Traditional	3342	3.13741	.825061
Spring Cumulative GPA	Scaffolded	2885	3.26110	.691822
	Traditional	3168	3.14778	.753896

When looking at the rates of credits completed at the end of the fall and spring semesters, no statistically significant difference was found between those who attended traditional programming compared to those who attended a scaffolded model. Specifically students who attended the scaffolded orientation program (M=.93, SD=.21) completed slightly higher credits in the fall semester compared to those who attended traditional orientation programming (M=.92, SD=.20), but the results were not statistically significant $F(1, 6535) = .258$, $p = .612$, $\eta^2 < .001$.

Students who attended the scaffolded orientation program (M=.88, SD=.30) completed slightly higher credits in the spring semester compared to those who attended traditional orientation programming (M=.87, SD=.30). However, the results were not statistically significant

$F(1, 6535) = 1.82, p = .178, \eta^2 < .001$. Table 4.4 details the descriptive statistics of the participants based on the orientation modality and credit completion percentage at the conclusion of the fall and spring semesters.

Table 4.4 Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance for Credit Completion Rates by Orientation Program Format

	Cohort	N	Mean	SD
Fall Credit Completion Rates	Scaffolded	3124	.92682	.205212
	Traditional	3413	.92426	.200743
Spring Credit Completion Rates	Scaffolded	3124	.87871	.299809
	Traditional	3413	.86866	.302103

Research Question 3

Research question three examines the difference that might exist in grade point averages achieved (GPA) and credit completion rates (CCR) after the first and second semesters based on attending orientation programming in-person or virtually (orientation modality). This question examined only the students within the 2023-2024 cohort, because the 2018-2019 cohort was not provided an opportunity to attend programming virtually.

When looking at the cumulative GPA achieved by these students at the end of the fall and spring semesters, there was a statistically significant difference between those who attended orientation in-person and virtually. Specifically students who attended in-person programs ($M=3.29, SD=.75$) achieved higher fall cumulative GPAs compared to those who attended virtual orientation programming ($M=3.16, SD=.84$), and the results were statistically significant with a small effect, $F(1, 2641) = 19.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = .007$.

Students who attended the in-person orientation program ($M=3.33$, $SD=.65$) achieved higher spring cumulative GPAs compared to those who attended virtual orientation programming ($M=3.24$, $SD=.69$), and the results were significant $F(1, 2530) = 11.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .004$. Table 4.5 details the descriptive statistics of the participants based on the orientation modality and cumulative GPA achieved at the conclusion of the fall and spring semesters.

Table 4.5 Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance for Cumulative GPA by Scaffolded Modality

	Cohort	N	Mean	SD
Fall Cumulative GPA	In-Person	1412	3.29487	.746510
	Virtual	1231	3.15862	.838717
Spring Cumulative GPA	In-Person	1369	3.33055	.649404
	Virtual	1163	3.24169	.687512

When looking at the credit completion rates at the end of the fall and spring semesters, there was a statistically significant difference between those who attended orientation in-person compared to the virtual orientation programming. Students who attended the in-person orientation program ($M=.93$, $SD=.16$) completed slightly higher credits in the fall semester compared to those who attended virtual orientation programming ($M=.93$, $SD=.20$), and the results were statistically significant $F(1, 2678) = 8.78$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 < .003$.

Moreover, students who attended the in-person orientation program ($M=.92$, $SD=.25$) completed slightly higher credits in the spring semester compared to those who attended virtual orientation programming ($M=.88$, $SD=.30$), and the results were found to be statistically significant $F(1, 2678) = 10.14$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 < .004$. Table 4.6 details the descriptive statistics of the participants based on the orientation modality and credits completed at the conclusion of the fall and spring semesters.

Table 4.6 Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance for Credit Completion Rates by Scaffolded Modality

	Cohort	N	Mean	SD
Fall Credit Completion Rates	In-Person	1430	.95101	.162789
	Virtual	1250	.93051	.195441
Spring Credit Completion Rates	In-Person	1430	.91793	.245348
	Virtual	1250	.88486	.292127

Summary

For these analyses, academic and retention records were obtained for 6,537 first-year students across the 2018-2019 (3,413 students) and 2023-2024 (3,124 students) academic cohorts. The data, analyses, and results contained in this chapter addressed the research questions about academic achievement and student retention in correlation to orientation program format and modality. The analysis between retention and program format, scaffolded versus traditional, found no statistical significance. The analysis between GPA and program format indicated a statistically significant difference between attending scaffolded versus traditional orientation programs. However, when looking at credit completion ratio and program format, the analysis indicated no statistically significant difference between scaffolded and traditional programming. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in both GPA and course completion rates when comparing students attending in-person versus virtual orientation programs. Chapter five discusses key findings, implications of the data, limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 5 – Summary, Discussion and Recommendations

This quantitative study identified the differences in students' academic performance and retention at Louis Miles University (LMU) between those who participated in the scaffolded orientation programs and those who attended traditional orientation programming. This research also examined the differences in academic performance comparing modality, in-person or virtual, for orientation programs. Data were collected via LMU student records for first-year students in the 2018 and 2023 fall cohorts.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Are there significant differences in retention rates from the first to second year between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?
2. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?
3. Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between those who attended in-person orientation programming compared to those who attended virtual programming?

Quantitative data analyses were used, specifically ANOVA and Pearson’s chi-square tests, to answer these research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Institutions of higher learning have implemented orientation programming or a similar experience to provide support and assistance to the incoming freshman classes for over 100 years (Daddona & Cooper, 2002). Numerous research studies have been conducted over the past several decades that showcase the impact orientation programming can have on student retention, specifically for first-year, traditional-aged students. In the review of the literature, it is clear that some form of orientation programming positively impacts first-year retention (Chan, 2017; Chasteen, 2005; Glass Jr. & Garrett, 1995; Lehning, 2008; Pascarella et al., 1986; Yang, 2001). Yet, the number of studies that examine differing orientation structures and their effect on student retention and academic achievement are limited. Further, it is known that student expectations and individual needs continue to shift and change (Fischer, 2022). This study aimed to identify differences in how orientation structure and modality reflected differences in student retention and academic achievement.

Research Question One

Are there significant differences in retention rates from the first to second year between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?

Research question one focused on possible differences in retention from the first fall to returning for a second year relative to orientation structure. The analysis of research question one was found not to be statistically significant. Ramist (1981) suggested that orientation takes on an important role in retaining students by helping them make the most of their college experience and understanding how a university is there to support them. Numerous research studies have been conducted over the past several decades that showcased the impact orientation

programming can have on student retention, specifically for first-year, traditional-aged students. In the review of the literature, it is clear that some form of orientation programming positively impacts first-year retention (Chan, 2017; Chasteen, 2005; Glass Jr. & Garrett, 1995; Lehning, 2008; Pascarella et al., 1986; Yang, 2001). Orientation programming is one component that aids in the transition and retention efforts of an institution.

In this study, the scaffolded programming offered for the 2023-2024 cohort did not reflect a statistically significant difference in retention compared to the traditional orientation program students attended in the 2018-2019 cohort. The decision to stay at an institution, move to another university, or leave post-secondary education altogether consists of multiple factors, many of which are out of university control (Rinn, 2022). Kerby's (2015) predictive voluntary dropout model, depicted in Appendix E, brings together external factors, pre-college factors, and internal factors to the university that help university leadership predict and aid in the retention of students. The two orientation programs outlined in this study focus programming efforts within the internal factors of institutional climate outlined by Kerby (2015) as faculty/student interaction, peer organizations and connection, as well as academic and student support. Both the traditional and scaffolded orientation programs at LMU had components geared towards assisting students with social integration into the university culture. There are a variety of other elements, such as the national climate, pre-college academic performance, tuition rates and financial aid, sociocultural factors, etc., that Kerby (2015) outlined as predictive factors that orientation programming has little to no control over. Amongst numerous factors contributing to the retention equation, this study concluded that variations in orientation structure, on their own, fail to produce any significant differences in student retention rates.

While orientation programming plays an important role in aiding student retention and fostering social integration into university culture, its influence must be understood as part of a larger, multifaceted framework. The findings of this study demonstrate that variations in orientation structure, in isolation, do not yield a statistically significant difference on retention rates. Recognizing these interconnected elements is essential for developing comprehensive strategies that address the diverse challenges impacting student retention and success.

Research Question Two

Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between participants attending “just-in-time” programs compared to those who attended traditional orientation programs?

Research question two examined whether there was a significant difference in academic performance, specifically GPA and credits completed, based on the orientation format attended. A positive, statistically significant difference was found when analyzing the GPAs of students who participated in the scaffolded program. However, no statistical difference was found when analyzing credit completion rates between the two programs. Past research has looked at the academic success of students who have completed some form of orientation programming (extended orientation, onboarding course, summer orientation program, etc.) compared to those who did not participate in the experience (Chasteen, 2005; Davis, 2013; Glass Jr. & Garrett, 1995; Lehning, 2008) with varying statistical significance. However, studies comparing orientation formats are not as abundant in recent research.

Students who attended the scaffolded program achieved statistically significantly higher GPAs in both the fall and spring semesters compared to those who attended the traditional

program format. The just-in-time format of the scaffolded program delivers targeted information and knowledge precisely when needed, maximizing its relevance and impact (Clove, 2022).

LMU's scaffolded orientation program is broken down into three major components: advising and enrollment, orientation, and kickoff.

In the scaffolded program, students connected with their academic advisor in a one-on-one setting, unlike the traditional program which advised students in a group setting. A recent study found that students whose advisors focus on intrapersonal and interpersonal adjustments to college achieve higher GPAs at the end of their first semester (Hawthorne et al., 2022). A study from EAB found that students who meet with their advisor earlier are more likely to persist to the next term (Chuc, 2021). Most notably, students with the lowest likelihood to persist benefited from advising engagements the most. The virtual one-on-one advising offered in the scaffolded program ensured that all students were able to connect with their advisor, regardless of barriers such as location, jobs, or family priorities. Advisors also reported that virtual appointments make it easier to connect with students and engage in meaningful conversations (Chuc, 2021). The scaffolded program's one-on-one support fostered early relationships between students and their academic advisors ensuring each student received individualized attention. These relationships play a crucial role in student success by helping students understand and navigate the institution, ultimately equipping them with the resources needed to achieve greater academic outcomes (Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Within the scaffolded program, students engage with academic success resources such as tutoring, academic coaching, and the writing center during the kickoff events, which occur right before classes begin. Informing students of necessary resources right before their first semester starts makes it easier for them to apply their learning and increases the likelihood they will utilize

the resources (Bariudad, 2022). A recent study by the National Student Clearing House (2024) found that first-year GPA was the strongest predictor for timely completion for students seeking a bachelor's degree. The scaffolded orientation program provides a positive connection to higher degree completion rates, as students who participated in this program achieved statistically significant increases in both their first and second semester GPAs.

When analyzing the credit completion rates between the two formats, students who attended the scaffolded program completed a slightly higher percentage of credits attempted, but this finding was not statistically significant. There is a limited amount of research exploring the impact of orientation and onboarding programs on students' credit completion rates. However, research does suggest that students who have a greater sense of belonging tend to have higher motivations, more academic confidence, higher levels of engagements, and higher graduation rates (Pedler et al., 2022). Examining the graduation rates of the two cohorts offers a valuable opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the orientation format, providing deeper insights into its influence on long-term student success.

Regardless of orientation format, students at LMU completed credits at a much higher percentage (87%-93%) than the 2019-2020 Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) cohort (75%) (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). Though students have a high credit completion ratio, they are attempting a low volume of credits, ~13 credit hours per semester, as shown in Table 4.8. Based on previous research, students need to enroll in at least 15 credit hours per semester (30 per year) to ensure timely degree completion (Belfield et al., 2016). Credit completion ratio was found to be the sixth overall predictor for bachelor's completion (National Student Clearinghouse, 2024).

The scaffolded orientation program demonstrates a clear advantage in promoting student success through its targeted, individualized approach to academic advising and resource engagement. While GPA improvements and connections to academic resources highlight its effectiveness, additional exploration of credit completion rates and long-term outcomes, such as graduation rates, is necessary to fully assess its impact. These findings underscore the importance of innovative orientation models in fostering student achievement and timely degree completion.

Research Question Three

Is there a significant difference in academic performance, measured by grade point average and credit completion, at the end of the first and second semesters of the first-year experience between those who attended in-person orientation programming compared to those who attended virtual programming?

Research question three examined whether there was a difference in academic achievement, specifically GPA and credits completed, based on the orientation modality attended within the scaffolded orientation. Both items were statistically significant in favor of students attending in-person programming. This finding was consistent between fall and spring semesters. Offering a synchronous virtual option for the orientation program addressed a need for access, specifically for out-of-state and international students, but did not achieve the program outcomes (Crozier, 2021). The program goals of helping students create a sense of belonging, affirming university choice, and connecting with academic units were not integrated into the virtual experience. This finding aligns with Dumford and Miller's (2018) research, which indicates that students attending virtual orientations are less likely to engage in collaborative learning or participate in open discussions with diverse groups. The synchronous virtual program was very

transactional. Low belonging can result in students acting in ways that work against their belonging, potentially engaging in detrimental behaviors, and having increased risks for dropping out and overall poor academic performance (Allen, 2020). The lack of personal connection may have impacted students' overall GPA and credit completion achievements in their first year. Kerby's (2015), Bean's (1980) and Tinto's (1975) retention models all have components dedicated to social integration, peer group interaction, or assurance of a social life. Within each model, social integration is connected to academic performance or overall academic integration. The two components must work in tandem to develop an overall sense of place within the campus culture (Kirby, 2015).

While the synchronous virtual orientation option successfully addressed accessibility concerns for out-of-state and international students, it fell short of fostering a sense of belonging and achieving the program's intended outcomes. The in-person format consistently demonstrated stronger results in academic achievement, retention rates, and social integration. These findings highlight the critical role that personal connections and collaborative experiences play in supporting student success, emphasizing the importance of integrating these elements into future orientation programs to create a more holistic and impactful experience for all participants.

Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on a single institution, as data was drawn exclusively from two academic cohorts at Louis Miles University. Though the large sample size yielded statistically significant results, the effect size was small. This showcases that retention, GPA, and credit completion rates are all complex and influenced by many factors. Additionally, the study specifically examines first-time college-going students, restricting its scope to a particular student demographic. Future research could address these limitations by exploring similar

questions with other learner groups, such as transfer students, returning students, or graduate students as well as other university types.

Retention has long been recognized as a complex phenomenon that can be understood through various frameworks. This study, however, was limited to a quantitative approach, relying solely on statistical data without delving into the narratives behind the numbers. Students' personal stories and the specific reasons for their departure from the institution were not explored. Additionally, the data used in this study was collected at specific points during the student's first year, leaving the experiences of triumph, struggle, connection, and resilience that occurred between these data points unanalyzed.

This study is limited by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed the comparison of only two years of student data, 2018 and 2023. The significant time gap between these academic cohorts introduces potential variability in the overall student experience that extends beyond the scope of orientation and onboarding. Specifically, students in the 2023 cohort completed their high school education during an unprecedented period characterized by a lack of in-person learning and socialization. These unique circumstances may have influenced their transition to college in ways that the 2018 cohort did not experience, potentially affecting the internal validity of the findings of this study. Despite its limitations, the findings of this study provide valuable insights with significant implications for both practical applications and future research endeavors.

Recommendations for Practice

Student retention is influenced by numerous factors beyond the university's control, making it a complex challenge (Rinn, 2022). While orientation programming may seem like a minor factor in the larger context of retention, requiring orientation as a crucial part of

onboarding can ensure a consistent and supportive experience for incoming students. In the post-pandemic landscape, orientation programs should offer resources when pertinent, increase engagement through various platforms, provide flexibility and balance, as well as continued communication post program (Fischer, 2022).

The transition from a traditional one-day programming to a scaffolded approach reflected positively on students' GPA outcomes. Additionally, the scaffolded program increased equity by accommodating those unable to attend in-person (Fischer, 2022). However, students participating in the virtual programming demonstrated lower GPAs and completed fewer credit hours compared to their in-person peers. To foster a sense of community and to facilitate student engagement, it is highly recommended that at least one component of orientation be offered in-person and on-campus. If both virtual and in-person orientation programs are offered, informing students that in-person attendance is preferred may increase overall attendance. Virtual orientation programming should provide both informative content and opportunities for connection. Utilizing virtual platforms that allow for small breakout rooms can assist in replicating some components of in-person programming.

To ensure consistency across orientation modalities, the implementation of required asynchronous online modules for all incoming students is recommended. The development of online modules must include videos, simple navigation, and interactive components to aid in overall student engagement (Hale & Buzas, 2014). The asynchronous nature of online modules allows students to complete the content on their own time and creates opportunities for personalized content (Crozier, 2021). Regardless of orientation platform, students at LMU are not attempting enough credit hours in their first year to complete a bachelor's degree within a four-year timeline. Stronger communication and collaboration with academic advisors may

provide an opportunity to increase credit enrollment to assist in degree completion rates (Alzen et al., 2021).

Students within the scaffolded programming achieved higher fall and spring semester GPAs compared to those who participated in traditional programming. By continuing to decouple experiences such as advising and orientation, as implemented in the scaffolded model, students can receive critical information precisely when it is most relevant to them. A scaffolded model provides opportunities for greater accessibility, enhanced retention of information, and more engaged participants (Cloke, 2022).

The findings of this study underscore the importance of implementing scaffolded orientation programs that incorporate online modules and in-person components. By ensuring cohesive content delivery, enhancing student engagement, and fostering a sense of community, institutions can better support the academic success and retention of their diverse student populations. The insights gained from this research provide a valuable foundation for developing effective orientation strategies that address the unique needs of all students.

Recommendations for Research

The results of this study provide a direction for further research on orientation programming, specifically the timing of content delivery. Conducting this study with a single academic cohort is recommended to achieve a more precise comparison of the different formats. This condensed sample size could provide greater insight into the key difference between the program formats. Additionally, a qualitative study that seeks to understand the impact of each orientation program format could help make sense of the statistical findings. Facilitating focus groups or interviews with students who went through each program format may provide greater clarity on format impact. Future researchers could conduct qualitative studies to explore the

underlying reasons for student attrition, providing deeper insights to connect with the findings of this study.

Future research should aim to explore student demographics within each cohort more thoroughly, as well as the specific modality chosen within the scaffolded program. While this study utilized a large sample size, the overall effect was relatively small. Delving deeper into variables such as orientation format, delivery modality, and demographic characteristics could yield valuable insights to enhance future practices. By understanding how the orientation model impacts different demographics, researchers can identify which components are most effective, the optimal timing for their delivery, and the specific groups that would benefit most.

Future research should be focused on the transfer student experience with regard to the two different orientation formats. Findings may differ between first-year students and those who have attended a previous institution. Similar to first-year students, transfer students need a specialized orientation to get information and resources to succeed in a new campus environment but with previous college experience it may not look exactly the same (Sachs, 2022). The results from this study provide valuable insights for orientation leadership, offering practical strategies for effectively onboarding both types of students.

Additional research should focus specifically on academic achievement. This study found that students, regardless of orientation platform, were enrolling in and completing less credits their second semester. Looking into why this is occurring for first-year students could provide evidence-based insights into what interventions need to occur between the first and second semester to see greater credit completion rates. This research could also provide academic advisors with justification to enroll students in a higher number of credit hours per semester (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). High school dual enrollment programs are on the rise.

Dual-enrollment programs have grown so fast that the U.S. Education Department did not even systematically track how many students were taking them until 2024 (Marcus, 2025). Future research should include this demographic of student and focus on the impact prior credit may have on their overall success after attending one of the orientation programs.

The recommendations outlined in this study offer a robust framework for further research on orientation programming. By focusing on single academic cohorts, facilitating qualitative studies, and investigating student demographics, future research can yield more precise and actionable insights. Additionally, examining the experiences of transfer students and focusing on academic achievement will contribute to a deeper understanding of orientation program impacts. These efforts will ultimately inform the development of more effective orientation programs, tailored to the diverse needs of students, and support their academic success and retention in higher education.

Summary

This quantitative study investigated the differences in academic achievement and first to second-year retention between two orientation program formats. Institutional data was collected in alignment with the student orientation program format: traditional (2018-2019) and scaffolded (2023-2024). The findings of this study revealed no significant difference in retention rates when comparing orientation formats. Specific subgroups, including first-generation students and out-of-state students, did showcase a higher retention percentage when attending the scaffolded program. Statistically significant outcomes were found when analyzing GPA achieved in both fall and spring semesters. Students who attended the scaffolded program, specifically the in-person experience, achieved higher GPAs than those who attended the traditional format. When analyzing credit completion rates, no statistically significant difference was found when

comparing formats. Recognizing the importance of orientation programs and aligning content delivery with students' needs fosters greater academic performance and overall success. By continually refining these programs, institutions can ensure new students thrive in higher education and experience a seamless transition to college life.

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Appendix A – Traditional Orientation Schedule

All university identifiers have been illuminated.

Student Schedule of Events - June 2018

Welcome to [REDACTED] We're glad you are here. Today's events are designed to help you prepare for your first semester at [REDACTED]. These activities will help answer your questions and provide you with the opportunity to make important connections.

Schedule for Today

8:00 a.m.	Check-in	Ground floor, [REDACTED] Student Union
8:30 a.m.	Tips for Success	Second floor, [REDACTED] Student Union
9:45 a.m.	The [REDACTED] Show	Main Ballroom, [REDACTED] Student Union
11:15 a.m.	College Orientation and Advising Session	Various locations

**Afternoon activities listed on last page.*

Orientation staff will be available at the [REDACTED] **Information Booth** ([REDACTED]), first floor of the [REDACTED] Student Union, to answer questions and provide assistance from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

8:00 a.m. Check-in

After you check in, ask yourself if you have:

Received all of your materials?

You will receive materials at check-in that will be important during today's activities and your time at [REDACTED].

Please be sure you have the following:

- Enrollment form
- Name tag and lunch ticket
- Packet of information

Taken an ID photo?

Your student ID gives you access to university services and events. If you do not have your picture taken in the morning you may do so later today. Your card will cost \$18 and will be charged to your tuition bill. You may pick up your ID after 1:00 p.m. at the ID center, ground floor, [REDACTED] Student Union.

Created and know your eID?

In addition to your student ID card, you will have an eID or electronic identifier. You will need to know your eID to enroll and complete other important functions today. If you do not have or do not know your eID and password please tell an orientation staff member during check-in.

Taken the math placement exam?

Prior to attending today you should have completed [REDACTED] online math placement exam. This information will be used by you and your advisor during the advising process. If you have not completed the exam you will need to complete it following the 11:15 a.m. college advising session and prior to enrolling.

The exam may be accessed at: [REDACTED]

Make your way into the [REDACTED] Student Union Ballroom, Second Floor.
Be prepared to share what major you have selected. Take time to look at what activities are available this afternoon on the next few pages! There is a checklist on the back page to help set you up for success at [REDACTED] before you leave today.

Seating for the morning program is based on your intended major. Please sit with the major you indicated at check-in, even if it is different from the one you listed on your application for admission. You will go to your designated choice for the college orientation and advising session. This is the college you will enroll in as a new student. You will be asked to honor your initial decision for the remainder of the day.

Please choose one of the following groups:

- College of Agriculture*
- College of Architecture, Planning & Design*
- College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Business Administration
- College of Education
- College of Engineering*
- College of Human Ecology*
- Open Option (Undeclared)
- Pre-Nursing and Pre-Pharmacy

8:30 a.m. Tips for Success

Current students serving as orientation leaders will share information you will need to successfully enroll in classes and get your experience started. You will learn the basics of being a successful student.

9:45 a.m. The K-State Show

This entertaining show will let you know what to expect during your first semester and what services are available to support you during your K-State experience. Dr. Pat Bosco, vice president for student life and dean of students, will be your host. Enjoy the show!

11:15 a.m. College Orientation and Advising Session

This is the first step in the process of advising and selecting your fall courses. You need to choose the appropriate session to attend based on your intended academic major. A college representative will tell you about the course selection process and how to make an appointment with your advisor. We will walk you to your academic session, where you will meet up with your parents/guests.

College of Agriculture

(Includes Agricultural Education, Pre-Veterinary Medicine & Wildlife & Outdoor Enterprise Management*)

College of Architecture, Planning and Design *

College of Arts and Sciences

All Arts and Sciences Health Profession students attend this session

College of Business Administration

College of Education

(Includes Elementary and Secondary Education. PLEASE NOTE EXCEPTIONS: Agriculture, Family and Consumer Sciences Education, Early Childhood, and Music Education)

College of Human Ecology

(This includes Apparel and Textiles, Athletic Training, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Dietetics, Early Childhood Education, Family and Consumer Sciences Education, Human Development and Family Science, General Human Ecology, Hospitality Management, Interior Design*, Kinesiology, Nutrition and Kinesiology, Nutritional Sciences, Nutrition and Health, and Personal Financial Planning.)
All Human Ecology Health Profession students attend this session

College of Engineering *

(Includes Computer Science and Construction Science and Management)

Open Option (Undeclared)

Pre-Nursing and Pre-Pharmacy

Pre-Veterinary Medicine students may enroll in Agriculture OR Arts and Sciences

For other health areas, attend the Health Professions Information Session at 12:00pm or 3:00pm (next page).

**Appointments with advisors will be scheduled throughout the afternoon and early evening today.
After meeting with an advisor, you will officially enroll and receive a copy of your 2018 fall class schedule.**

*Majors with different requirements: the colleges and majors noted above with an asterisk exercise selective admission or have a GPA requirement that is higher than the general university requirement. Students must receive special permission to enroll in these programs.

Special Afternoon Activities

The following events are scheduled for your benefit. Please attend activities of interest that fit into your schedule.

Lunch

Time: Noon to 3 p.m.*

Location: K-State Student Union food court

Select your lunch from the options in the Food Court and pay at the respective register. The lunch ticket you were given during check-in is worth a total of \$8.00 including tax and is valid only at the food court, and Subway. No change will be given. Siblings and other guests may purchase their meals.

*Stop by the [redacted] for lunch options after 3:00 p.m.

[redacted] Expo

Time: Noon - 4 p.m.

Location: Ground and First Floor, [redacted] Student Union. Visit with representatives from student services and groups from across campus and [redacted]. Find information on student employment and involvement opportunities.

Modern Language Testing*

Time: 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Location: The [redacted] Language Center, 001 [redacted] Hall

Placement tests will be given to students who plan to enroll in modern languages and have prior experience in a language. Following testing, students will meet with a language advisor to be placed in the proper language course(s).

Passport to University Success*

Time: Noon to 4:00 p.m.

Location: Expo, Ground Floor, [redacted] Student Union. The University Success Center promotes student success academically, socially, and personally. Visit our booths and complete the University Success Center's Passport to become eligible to enter a drawing for a free 1-credit hour!

Stop by to explore opportunities to work with academic coaches or tutors, enroll in [redacted] First learning communities and get connected to a GPS mentor, learn about disability accommodations, connect to compassionate advocates, engage in mental wellness, and so much more. Drop off your completed Passport at the USC table to be entered to win!

Honors Program Information

Learn more about the University Honors Program, including fall course options. To receive permission to enroll in honors courses, please stop by [redacted] Hall between noon and 5 p.m. or call [redacted].

Health Professions Information Session

Time: 12 p.m. or 3:00 p.m.

Location: Room 227, [redacted] Student Union

Attend this session to learn about the benefits of Pre-Health advising and careers in Dentistry, Medical Lab Sciences, Chiropractic, Health Information Management, Medicine, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant, Veterinary Medicine, and Respiratory Care.

Pre-Law Information Session

Time: 12 p.m.

Location: 215 [redacted] Hall

All majors are welcome. Attend this session to learn about the benefits of a law degree, careers in the legal profession, and the Office of Pre-Law Advising.

Order or Buy Textbooks

Employees at the K-State Campus Bookstore, located on the ground floor of the [redacted] Student Union, can help you order or buy textbooks and supplies. A class schedule is needed. Please be sure to review the refund and exchange policy.

Student Organization Information*

Stop by the Center for Student Involvement table during the [redacted] Expo on the ground floor of the [redacted] Student Union, for information about all student organizations and how to join. Explore a number of student organizations hosting an information table throughout the first floor as well. Detailed information about other student organizations can be found at [redacted].

* Indicates they will have an exhibit at the [redacted] Expo.

Meningococcal Vaccine*

Time: 12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Location: Expo, First Floor, **K-State** Student Union

Cost: Meningococcal Vaccine \$120 (check, credit card, or cash accepted)

The **Kansas Board of Regents** requires incoming students residing in student housing be vaccinated to prevent meningitis or sign a waiver declining receipt of the meningococcal vaccine.

Residence Hall Tours*

Time: 2:00, 2:30, and 3:00 p.m.

Location: Housing and Dining display at the **K-State** Expo. Tours of a traditional-style residence hall will leave at the announced times from the Housing and Dining display in the **K-State** Student Union or you can go to the front desk of **K-State** Hall and request a tour. Tours of other residence halls or scholarship houses are not available due to construction and summer camps and conferences. Inquire at the expo display for more information including floor plan layouts and room dimensions.

Campus Tour and Walk Your Schedule

Location: **K-State** Hall, First Floor, **K-State** Student Union

If you would like a walking tour of campus or an orientation leader to walk your class schedule with you, stop by the **K-State** Hall, first floor, **K-State** Student Union.

Students with Disabilities*

If you are a student with a disability and want to discuss accommodations for enrollment, transportation, housing or academics (i.e. sign language interpreter test-taking, alternative text), contact the **K-State** Center, 202 **K-State** Hall or call **K-State**.

Technology Training and Support*

Location: **K-State** Student Union, First Floor, Expo Training for **K-State** and other **K-State** systems is available by request at the IT Booth. Get questions answered about what computer to bring, where to go for help and free software available for students at the booth. Technical support is available in 214 **K-State** Library from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Non-Traditional and Veteran Student Services

If you are 25 years of age or older, married, a parent, a veteran, or are returning to school after an absence of three or more years, you are invited to stop by Non-Traditional and Veteran Student Services in the **K-State** Student Union, Room 217. Receive information and/or referrals on: scholarships, childcare, housing, tutoring, refresher and study skills courses, student health Insurance, campus activities and community programs, non-traditional student networking opportunities, and more!

** Indicates they will have an exhibit at the **K-State** Expo.*

Download the **K-State** mobile app to access the 2018 Orientation and Enrollment Badge on **K-State** 360. Perks include:

- Be in the know about what is happening around campus
- Track your involvement on campus
- Compete with others as you earn points by attending things
- Get connected. Get engaged. Get Involved.



Checklist for Today

Make sure you have completed the following today:

- ☐ Taken photo for student ID
- ☐ Picked up student ID
- ☐ Met with academic advisor
- ☐ Enrolled in classes and obtained fall class schedule
- ☐ Browsed the **K-State** Expo to explore services and opportunities
- ☐ Explored campus and walked your class schedule
- ☐ Checked your to-do list in **K-State** - Stop by the Office of Student Financial Assistance or the Office of Admissions tables at the **K-State** Expo if you have questions.
- ☐ Had all of your questions answered!

Appendix B – Scaffolded Orientation Schedule

Component	Timeframe	Description
Advising and Enrollment	Mid-April through June	One-on-one, virtual advising appointment lasting 60 minutes to enroll in fall courses.
Orientation	The majority of June, with additional dates in July and August	The one-day program focused on meeting new students, learning important information, and creating a sense of belonging. Virtual offerings provided.
Kickoff	August, before the start of classes	3 ½ day program to assist in college transition

All university identifiers have been illuminated.

SCHEDULE

Welcome

9:00 AM

██████████ Student Union

██████████ Students

9:20 AM

Courtyard, Student Union

██████████ Family

9:20 AM

Parents | Family - ██████████ Hall, Student Union

Being the parent and family member of a college student represents a new chapter in the relationship with your student. During this session we will discuss the support services that are available to you and your student. You will also get to hear directly from family members that have students at ██████████.

Academic Success

10:20 AM

Academic College, Various Locations

SCHEDULE

Check student name tag for group assignment.

PURPLE GROUP

Lunch

11:15 AM

[REDACTED] Dining Center

[REDACTED] Connect

12:15 PM

Connect with the areas that are most important to you anytime between 12:15-1:15 PM. See options on separate connect sheet.

WHITE GROUP

[REDACTED] Connect

11:15 AM

Connect with the areas that are most important to you anytime between 11:15-12:15 PM. See options on separate connect sheet.

Lunch

12:15 PM

[REDACTED] Dining Center

Navigating [REDACTED]

1:15 PM

Ballroom, Student Union

Choose Your Adventure

2:30-4:00 PM

Connect with members of the [REDACTED] community and get all your individual questions answered. See the full list of options on the next pages.

[REDACTED] Connect

Check student name tag for group assignment.

Residence Hall Tours

You will be able to see a tour room in the building you have selected to live in this fall. Tours will release from the basketball courts outside each complex ([REDACTED]). Tours will release at 11:15 AM, 11:45 AM, 12:15 PM, and 12:45 PM.

Transfer Student Connection: [REDACTED] Dining Center

Join us for a Transfer Connection session, where you can dive into a comprehensive checklist review to ensure every detail in your transition is covered, while getting answers to those burning questions you've been holding onto, as well as gain invaluable insights from current transfer students who've navigated the path you're about to embark on.

University Honors Program: [REDACTED]

Are you interested in joining the University Honors Program? Have you already been admitted into the program but have questions about the fall? Stop by [REDACTED] to meet Honors staff and learn more.

Leadership Studies Programs: Leadership Studies

Take a seat in one of [REDACTED] students favorite lecture halls in the [REDACTED] during your visit. We'll have ice cold drinks, our Leadership Studies minor advisor, current students, building tours, and details on many ways to get involved at [REDACTED]. Sessions are less than 25 minutes.

[REDACTED] Library

Come explore [REDACTED] Library and see all we have to offer, including the historical [REDACTED] (also called the Harry Potter Room for its similarity to the Great Hall in Hogwarts) and the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Innovation Lab (which offers a variety of technologies and tools to bring projects to life). Be sure to pick up a [REDACTED] Coin before you leave!

Choose Your Adventure Options

2:30-4:00 PM

████████ ID Pick Up: Alumni Association

Stop by the Alumni Association for a free scoop of ██████ ice cream and receive your ██████ ID after completing a quick feedback survey about your day.

Military Affiliation: ██████████ Welcome Center

At ██████████ University, we honor and support our military-affiliated students. Join us for a dedicated military-affiliated connection to learn about benefits to discovering tailored support services, this session is your one-stop-shop for all things military-related.

All Things Finances: ██████████ Welcome Center

Stop by to connect with Student Financial Assistance, Cashiers Office, ██████████ Financial, and Registrar to chat with a member of our team and learn more about the FAFSA, accepting financial aid, paying your tuition bill, and FERPA.

Career Center Connection: ████████████████████ Welcome Center

Stop by to learn more about on-campus job opportunities, our career exploration classes, and how to make an appointment with our staff this fall.

Pre-Professional & Exploratory Advising Center: ████████████████████ Welcome Center

Whether you're interested in working in healthcare, legal fields, or are unsure about what to do next, stop by and meet with one of our Pre-Health, Pre-Law, Pre-Vet or Exploratory advisors today. Bring questions, learn some key pointers for your time at ██████████, or simply say hello and put a face to a name.

Choose Your Adventure Options

2:30-4:00 PM

Academic Achievement Center: [REDACTED]

The Academic Achievement Center is your free academic support package while you're here at [REDACTED]. Stop in to chat with our staff about how we ensure that all learners have the opportunity for academic success by providing guidance through the learning process by providing free tutoring, coaching, and success tools.

Spectrum Center: [REDACTED]

The LGBT Resource Center at [REDACTED] is dedicated to supporting LGBT students, staff, faculty, and allied members of our campus and surrounding communities. Feel free to stop by to chat with a member of their team to connect and learn more about all the resources provided.

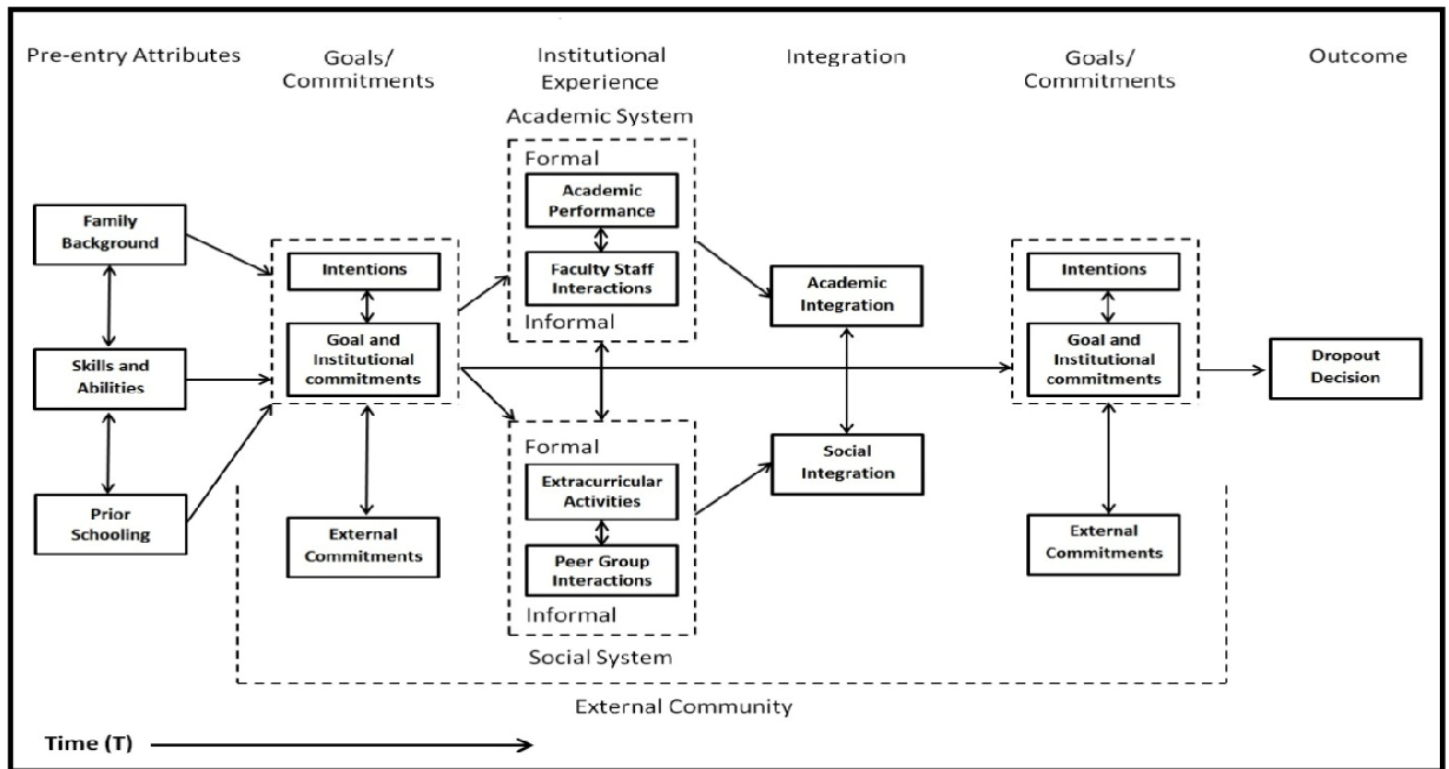
Student Access Center: [REDACTED]

The Student Access Center serves the campus community by partnering with students, faculty, and staff to create accessible environments and provide disability-related academic and housing accommodations for students in our [REDACTED] community. Our staff is eager to meet with you and discuss how we can support you on a successful transition to [REDACTED].

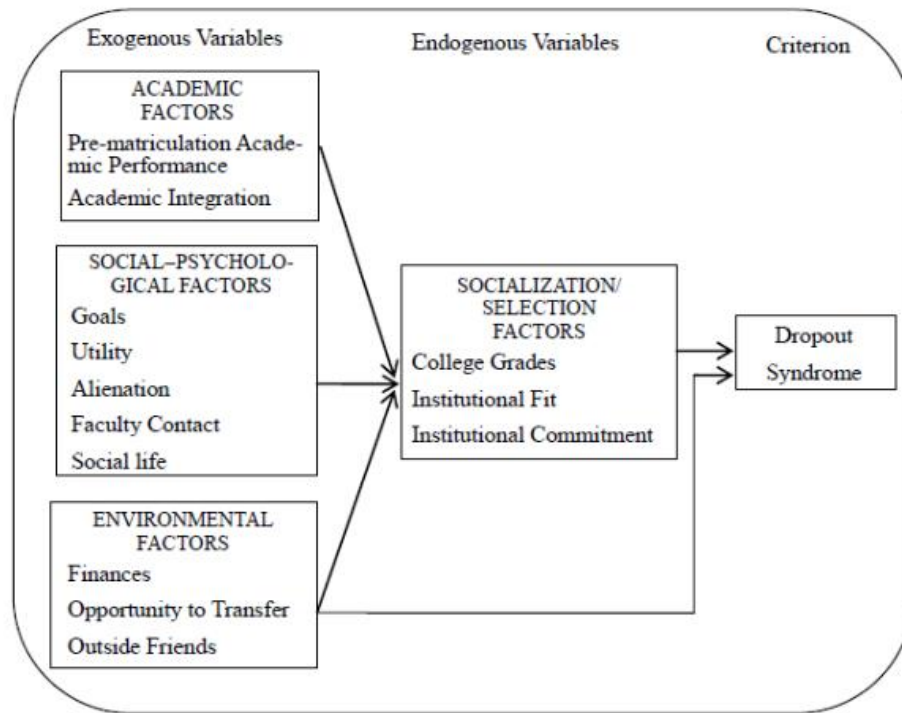
Recreation Center: [REDACTED]

Guests are welcome to tour the facility. Check in at the front desk to start exploring the Rec. We recommend driving to the Rec Complex. Guests are encouraged to park on the north side lot.

Appendix C – Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure

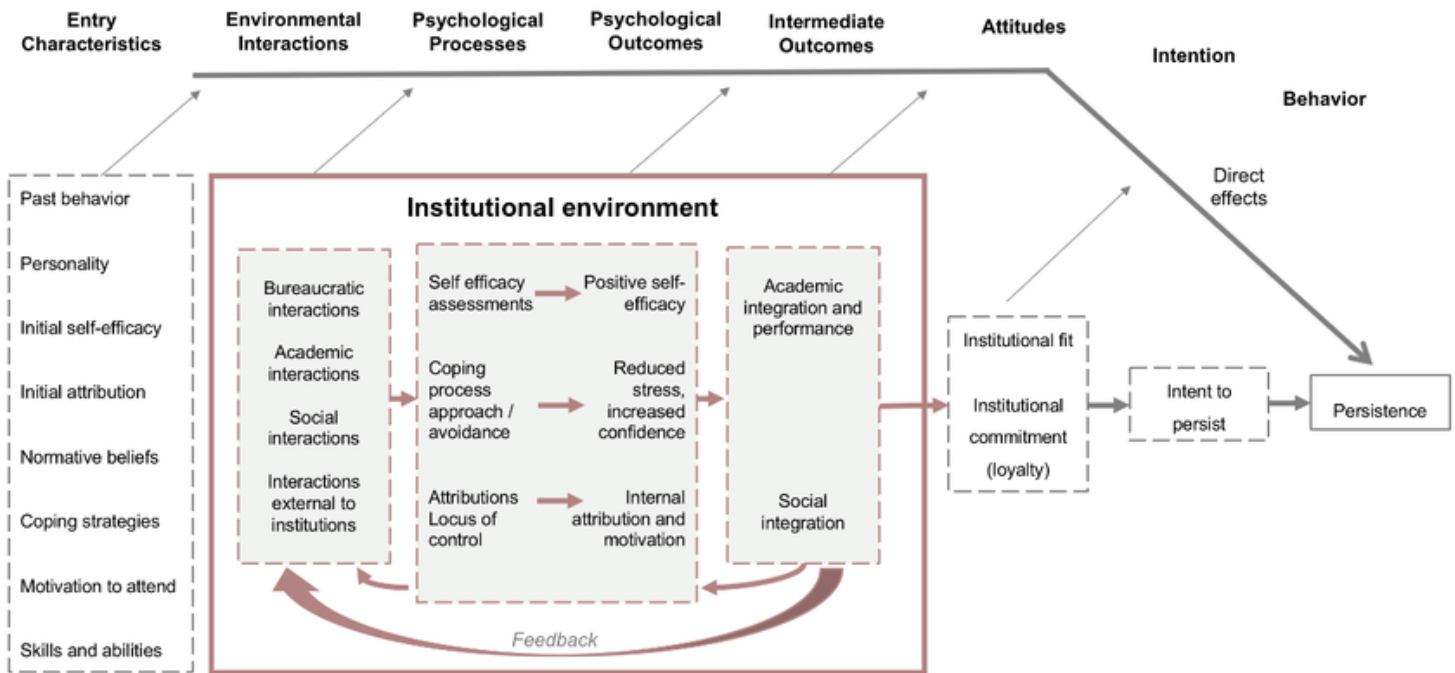


Appendix D – Bean’s Model of Student Departure

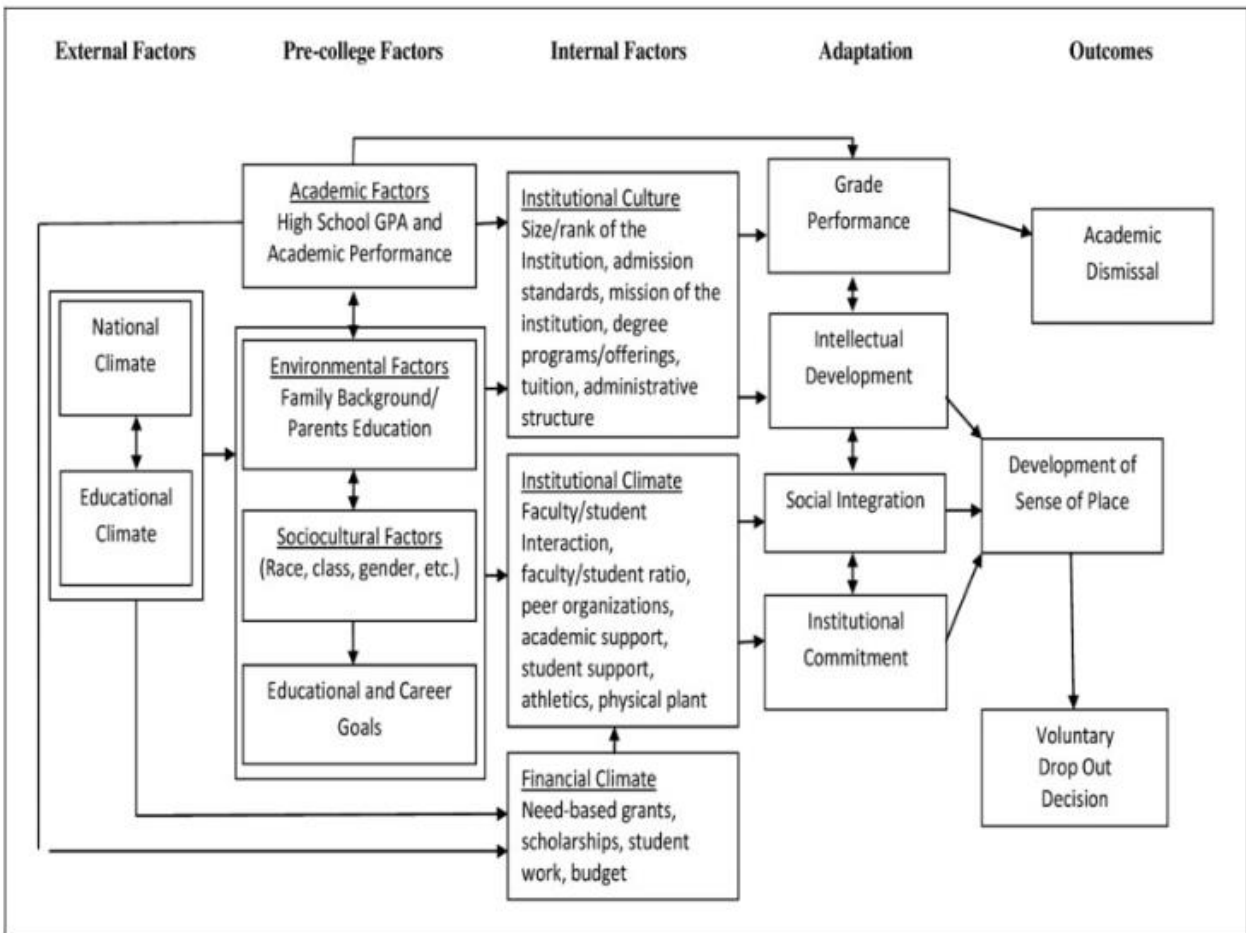


Appendix E – Bean and Eaton’s Psychological Model of College

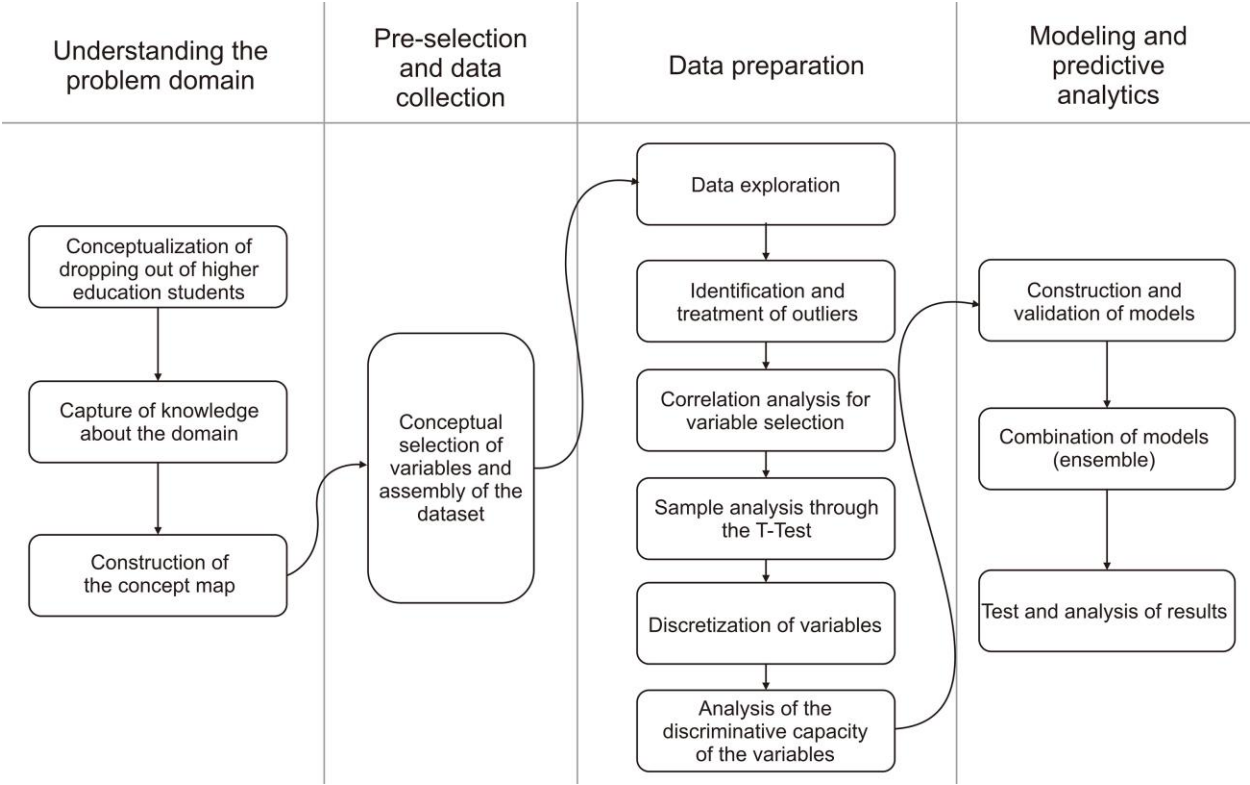
Student Retention



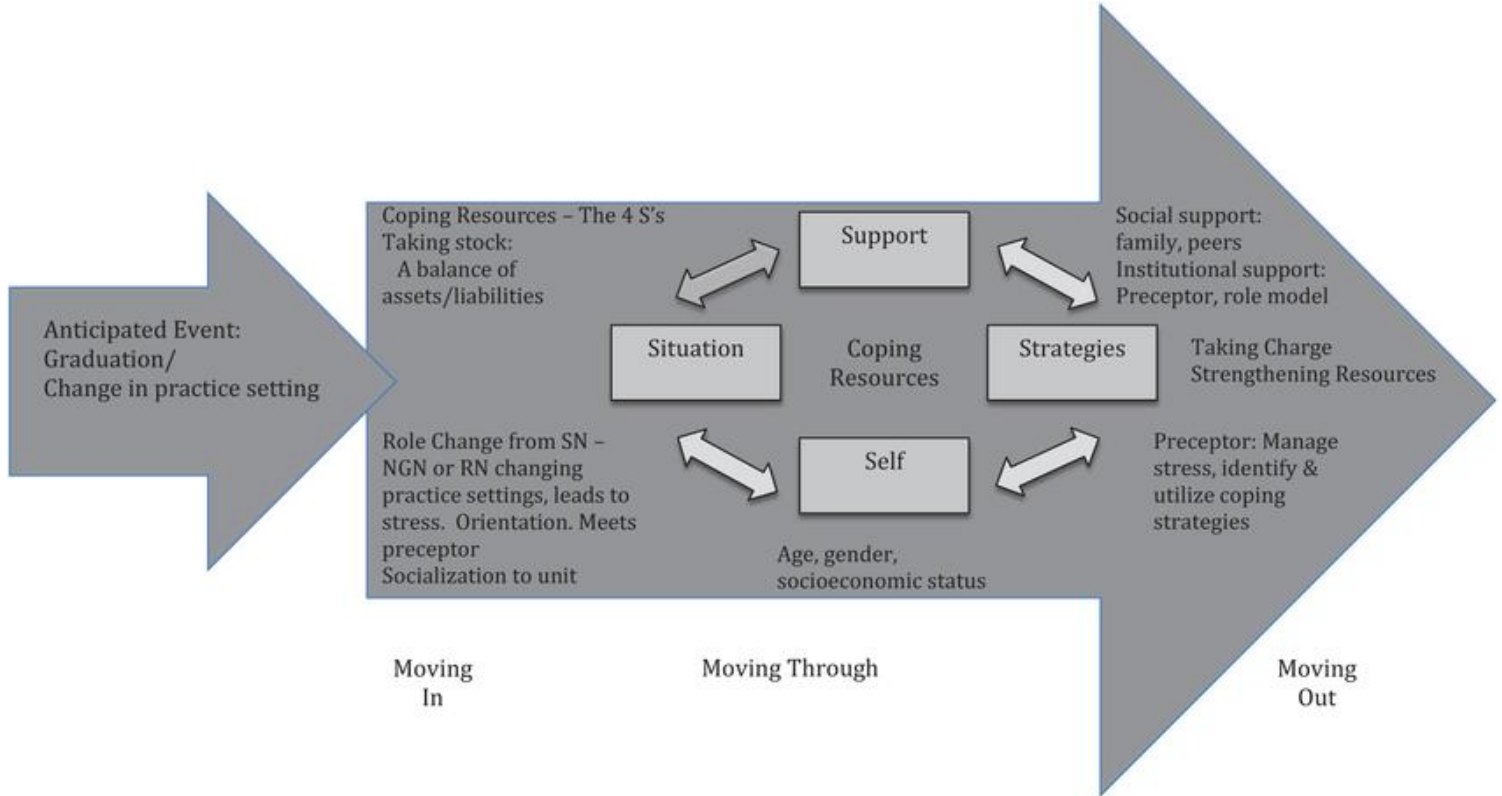
Appendix F – Kerby’s New Model of Voluntary Dropout



Appendix G – Rabelo & Zarate Model for Dropout Prediction



Appendix H – Schlossberg's Transitional Theory



Appendix I – CAS New Student Orientation Program Standards

PART 1. MISSION

1.1 Functional Area Mission New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must facilitate the transition of new students into the institution; prepare students for the institution’s educational opportunities and student responsibilities; and initiate the integration of new students into the academic, intellectual, cultural, and social facets of the institution.

The NSOP mission must be aligned with the mission and core values of the department, college, division, institution, and applicable professional standards.

The NSOP mission must be appropriate for the institution’s constituents. In implementing programs, NSOP must

- ‘ create and support programs that are welcoming of new students and their parents, families, and supporters
- ‘ engage students in shared learning and development opportunities
- ‘ address transition challenges and opportunities
- ‘ introduce and engage students with campus and community resources
- ‘ build a sense of community by providing opportunities for new students to meet other new students and members of the institution’s community

NSOP must include parents, families, and those who provide support to new students through orientation programming.

NSOP must also contribute to institutional enrollment management including retention.

Regardless of its organizational structure, NSOP must collaborate and consult with its constituents to advance its mission.

1.2 Mission Statements

NSOP must develop, implement, disseminate, regularly review, and update its mission statement.

NSOP mission statements must reference student learning, development, and success.

PART 2. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

2.1 Functional Area Goals

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must be guided by a set of written goals directly related to its stated mission, priorities, institutional core values, and expectations.

NSOP's goals must be aligned with institutional vision, mission, and core values. NSOP must align with institutional targets.

NSOP should determine if attendance at orientation is mandatory.

NSOP must develop goals addressing access, diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion.

NSOP must annually determine, review, assess, and consider revising its goals.

NSOP must determine and define its constituents.

2.2. Achieve and Communicate Functional Area Goals

NSOP must examine how its programs and services goals align with the NSOP mission and core values.

NSOP must provide programs and services addressing the diverse needs of its constituents.

Programs and Services for Students

NSOP must articulate the institution's expectations of students and provide information that clearly identifies relevant administrative policies, procedures, and programs to enable students to

New Student Orientation Programs 5

make well-reasoned and well-informed choices.

NSOP must introduce students to the institution's mission and to values that shape student experiences.

NSOP should create support programs that begin to establish an affiliation with the institution.

NSOP must teach new students how to navigate processes within the institution (e.g., registration, academic advising, financial aid, housing, campus employment).

NSOP must inform new students about support services that assist in achieving educational goals and attaining or refining academic skills.

NSOP must inform new students of educational opportunities, such as internships, special scholarship opportunities, study abroad programs, research, seminars, and conferences.

NSOP must provide new students with information about the physical layout of the campus, including the location and purposes of campus facilities, support services, co-curricular venues, and administrative offices.

NSOP must provide new students with information about technology resources used to conduct academic work and administrative processes.

NSOP should also present information about how to manage responsible and ethical use of institutional technology resources.

NSOP must offer distinctive programs that introduce students to both local and campus community networks, groups, and organizations.

NSOP must connect new students with other students, staff, and faculty members.

Programs and Services for Parents, Family, and Supporters

NSOP that offer programs for parents, families, and supporters must

- ‘ emphasize the independence of students in accomplishing their goals while acknowledging their interdependence with their peers and families

- ‘ communicate to parents, families, and supporters the expectation of supporting student independence in accessing institutional resources

- ‘ assist parents, families, and supporters with investigating and navigating institutional resources, services, and programs

- ‘ connect parents, families, and supporters with essential campus partners to facilitate collaboration

- ‘ provide information and help faculty and staff to interact effectively with parents, families, and supporters

- ‘ inform parents, families, and supporters about issues that impact the health, wellbeing, and success of students through a variety of delivery and communication methods, including newsletters, e-newsletters,

websites, social networking, and educational programming

- ‘ actively promote institution-sponsored activities designed to increase parent and family engagement such as parent and family weekends, advisory councils, etc.

NSOP must aid students and their parents, families, and supporters in understanding the nature and purpose of higher education, the mission and values of the institution, and their membership in the community.

NSOP must provide students and their parents, families, and supporters with information about government-mandated policies and procedures around campus safety, sexual violence prevention, student conduct, etc. (e.g., FERPA, Title IX, Clery Act).

NSOP must provide programs and services addressing access, diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion.

NSOP must introduce new students to institutional values around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and rights and responsibilities associated with joining a diverse academic community.

NSOP must provide information about how to access virtual support services and administrative offices.

NSOP must inform new students, as well as their parents, families and supporters about institutional programs and services that are offered to specific populations of students to enhance their overall success.

NSOP should promote institutional programs and services designed to support populations of students who have historically been marginalized or underserved including, but not limited to, students with disabilities, first-generation students, and veteran and military-connected students. NSOP must include its constituents when developing programs and services.

NSOP must engage qualified faculty, staff, or peer advisors to explain class scheduling and registration processes.

NSOP should assist students in the selection of appropriate courses and course levels, making use of relevant placement examinations, entrance examinations, and academic records.

NSOP must engage qualified faculty, staff, or peer advisors to explain opportunities for engagement outside the classroom.

NSOP programming for student learning and development should be tailored to the demographics of students it serves.

NSOP must design and facilitate intentional opportunities for new students to interact with other new students as well as continuing students, faculty, and staff.

NSOP must possess the ability to deliver programs remotely using technology that is accessible to all participants.

NSOP must communicate at least annually to its constituents its progress toward meeting the mission, goals, and intended outcomes.

NSOP must develop and implement strategies for outreach, marketing, and promotion of its programs and services that are consistent with the NSOP mission and goals.

NSOP must use multiple modes of delivery to meet the needs of its constituents.

NSOP must provide its programs in multiple delivery formats and using multiple learning strategies within the context of the learning environment.

NSOP must be based on the principles of active learning.

NSOP must determine which language will be used to refer to those program participants who support students (e.g., parents, families, supporters).

NSOP should select terminology regarding parents, families, and supporters that reflects the goals and objectives of its program and meets the needs of their student community.

2.3 Program Structure

NSOP must provide a research-informed, theory-informed, or evidence-based rationale for designing programs and services, strategies, and tactics intended to influence student learning, development, and success goals.

NSOP must establish and communicate a clear organizational structure for the implementation of its programs and services.

NSOP's administrative scope and structure must be guided by the size, nature, and complexity of the institution.

NSOP may be administered through multiple institutional offices.

All institutional offices involved in NSOP program delivery should be involved in the review of administrative policies and procedures as related to their roles within the orientation program.

NSOP must align the components, strategies, and tactics of its programs and services with NSOP goals and the corresponding student learning, development, and success outcomes.

NSOP should continue as a process to address transitional events, issues, and needs. The orientation process should include pre-enrollment, entry, and postmatriculation programs and services.

NSOP must be learner-centric and intentionally designed to meet the developmental needs of diverse students.

NSOP must be structured and resourced to ‘ balance efficiency and effectiveness

‘ respond to the needs of its constituents and

distinct populations ‘ ensure access for its constituents

Regardless of its organizational structure, NSOP must work in close consultation and collaboration with experts and utilize resources to meet the needs and interests of its constituents.

NSOP must coordinate the collaboration of other departments in the delivery of its programs.

NSOP must collaborate with colleagues and departments across the institution to develop programs and services consistent with the institutional core values and department functions.

PART 3. STUDENT LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUCCESS

3.1 Student Learning, Development, and Success New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP)

must contribute to student learning, development, and success by offering programs and services that support curricular and co-curricular experiences.

NSOP must design and facilitate opportunities for new students to learn about curricular and cocurricular initiatives that address their educational goals.

Integral to this effort, NSOP should develop partnerships with units and offices focused on student transition, persistence, learning, and success. These may include, but are not limited to, partnerships and collaborations with

- faculty and academic units that provide academic

- advising and support the selection of first term courses

- student and academic affairs departments that support student educational experiences

- key campus resources available at the institution

to address common challenges faced by new students during the transition to college

- NSOP partnerships and collaborations with student

- and academic affairs offices may support student educational experiences through • first-year experience programs

- academic bridge programs • first-year interest groups • early alert intervention programs • learning support, study groups, and tutoring

- education of NSOP personnel and students about available campus academic resources

NSOP must select relevant [CAS Student Learning and Development Domains and Dimensions](#)

or other recognized outcomes frameworks to help create written goals and intended outcomes for its programs and services. Outcomes must be developed within one or more of the following areas:

- Cognitive Complexity • Knowledge Acquisition • Interpersonal Development • Intrapersonal Development

- Local and Global Humanitarianism and Civic Engagement • Practical Competence

NSOP must provide educational opportunities and experiences for students targeting goals based on relevant [CAS Student Learning and Development Domains and Dimensions](#) or other outcomes frameworks.

NSOP should design and facilitate opportunities for new students to discuss their expectations and perceptions of the institution and to clarify their personal and educational goals.

NSOP should work directly with academic advising and career services functions to help students identify paths toward selecting educational and career options.

NSOP must align predetermined student learning, development, and success outcomes with the institutional framework for student outcomes.

NSOP must collaborate with institutional leaders to identify relevant, desirable, and feasible student learning, development, and success outcomes.

NSOP should consult with assessment experts within and external to the institution on the development of measurable student learning outcomes and strategies for measuring and gathering evidence.

NSOP should collaborate with other units within the institution engaging in assessment of student learning, development, and success outcomes.

NSOP must document the extent to which intentionally designed programming, strategies, and tactics are implemented as planned.

PART 4. ASSESSMENT

4.1 Assessment Culture, Plans, and Processes New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must create and sustain a culture of assessment that is transparent and valued by its constituents.

NSOP must continuously update orientation program content through formal and informal evaluation and the monitoring of current and emerging issues on campus.

NSOP must create assessment plans and processes in alignment with its mission and the core values of the institution. These plans and processes must

- ‘ be created in collaboration with NSOP

- constituents ‘ include NSOP goals, objectives, and outcomes

- ‘ engage NSOP in an ongoing cycle of assessment activities

- ‘ incorporate assessment of student learning, development, and success

- ‘ address the role of power and positionality for

- those conducting assessment ‘ be both ethical and equity-centered

- ‘ incorporate different approaches to creating,

- collecting, and measuring evidence of progress

- towards achieving goals, objectives, and outcomes

NSOP must develop a plan for assessing student learning, development, and success outcomes for all orientation participants.

NSOP's planning efforts must be adequate to project and accommodate both immediate and future needs.

NSOP must implement strategies, practices, services, and programming toward achieving its stated goals and evaluating intended outcomes.

NSOP must use data-informed decision-making.

NSOP must document progress toward goal, objective, and outcome achievement.

NSOP must evaluate its program based upon progress toward the achievement of short-range and long-range organizational goals.

NSOP must implement and communicate its self-assessment and program review timeline as determined appropriate by department, divisional, and/or institutional leaders.

NSOP must commit fiscal, human, and technological resources to develop, implement, and improve assessment plans.

NSOP must support professional development for those responsible for assessment.

NSOP must collaborate with appropriate departments on assessment of NSOP outcomes.

NSOP must use assessment data, research, and theory to review and revise program mission, goals, and outcomes in a regular cycle.

NSOP should regularly assess its programs and services and do so at least annually.

4.2 Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes NSOP must clearly define goals, objectives, and outcomes for what NSOP intends to achieve.

NSOP must encourage participants to participate in evaluating NSOP.

NSOP must annually invite participants to provide feedback on the performance of NSOP student employees.

NSOP should conduct a systematic evaluation of student satisfaction of orientation programs.

NSOP must assess programs administered virtually with regard to participant experiences with software, internet connection, and access to hardware.

NSOP should assess and report outcomes regarding faculty and staff participants, including, but not limited to, involvement of faculty and staff

collaboration among faculty and staff

satisfaction and value of faculty and staff engagement

• NSOP should gather assessment data from all its participants, including parents, families and supporters.

NSOP must develop student learning, development, and success outcomes using relevant frameworks.

NSOP should assess the extent to which student learning, development, and success outcomes are achieved, including • enrollment in subsequent terms after orientation • first-to-second year retention • persistence to timely degree completion

• academic achievement (e.g., satisfactory academic progress)

• participation and engagement in academic and co-curricular programs

• involvement and engagement in campus, community, and civic activities and leadership opportunities

• involvement in service-learning experiences, scholarships, or research projects

• involvement in internships, on-campus student employment, or apprenticeships

NSOP must review and revise goals, objectives, and outcomes annually, using data and relevant research to inform revisions.

4.3 Implementing Strategies to Achieve Goals and Outcomes

NSOP must use theory, research, and evidence to develop and implement its programs and services to achieve stated mission, goals, and outcomes.

4.4 Gathering Evidence and Data

NSOP must utilize equity-centered data collection processes.

NSOP must gather evidence and utilize multiple methods and measures of data collection.

NSOP should use various and multi-pronged assessment methods when evaluating student learning, development, and success outcomes. These may include, but are not limited to, rubrics, reflection exercises, skills tests, focus groups, and nationally recognized inventories and tools.

NSOP should benchmark its student learning and development outcome achievement with other reliable internal or external evidence.

NSOP may use quantitative measures including, but not limited to, data on the orientation reservation system, administration of centralized processes such as testing, operation of facilities (e.g., residence halls, dining, parking), process of registering for classes, quality of advising, orientation activities, and interaction with orientation staff.

NSOP should gather assessment data from all its constituents, including both internal and external partners.

NSOP must regularly evaluate and update methods of data collection.

NSOP must develop manageable processes for gathering and evaluating data.

NSOP must ensure measures and methods are rigorous and reflect characteristics of validity, reliability, and trustworthiness.

NSOP must adhere to institutional policies related to data access and management.

4.5 Reviewing and Interpreting Findings NSOP must analyze and interpret data using appropriate methods for the outcomes and questions developed in the planning processes.

NSOP must identify and address bias regarding analysis and interpretation.

NSOP must disaggregate data to identify issues related to equity and inclusion.

NSOP should disaggregate assessment results by student demographics when reviewing assessment outcomes, and address gaps as needed.

NSOP must compare findings to relevant literature on assessment areas of focus or interest.

4.6 Reporting Results and Implementing Improvement

NSOP must use data to demonstrate achievement of program outcomes and student learning, development, and success outcomes.

NSOP must accurately report and share assessment data with its constituents reflecting the impact of its programs on student learning.

NSOP must avoid deficit-based reporting of assessment results.

NSOP must articulate potential bias in data and reported findings when sharing or reporting results.

NSOP must communicate results and findings to its constituents using formats tailored to them.

NSOP should provide feedback regarding the quality of presentations to units whose representatives present to orientation participants.

NSOP must use evidence from assessment activities and research to inform decision-making and continuous improvement.

NSOP must suggest strategies for using results and findings.

NSOP should use assessment data to improve administrative processes and orientation programming.

NSOP must monitor improvements made based on assessment results.

NSOP must provide annual reports regarding how results and findings are used for continuous improvement.

NSOP must apply results to future planning.

ð GUIDING PRINCIPLE: ADVOCATING FOR DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES
PART 5. ACCESS, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND JUSTICE

5.1 Inclusive and Equitable Educational and Work Environments

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must establish goals for access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice and a process to review, evaluate, and update the goals as appropriate.

NSOP must create and maintain accessible, equitable, and inclusive educational and work environments for its constituents in accordance with the context of each institution's mission, institutional policies, and applicable codes and laws.

NSOP must not discriminate on the basis of race; color; national origin; sex; disability; age; cultural identity; ethnicity; nationality; citizenship; language; family educational history; political affiliation; religious affiliation; sexual orientation; gender identity and expression; marital and family status; socioeconomic status; housing status; veteran or military status; or any other basis included in codes, laws, and institutional policies.

NSOP must be sensitive to identities and characteristics in accordance with Aspects of Identity in the CAS Standards that may be used to discriminate or cause harm to others using its programs and services.

5.2 Organizational Aspects of Access, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

NSOP must provide equitable access to facilities, resources, and digital spaces for its constituents.

NSOP must consider the needs of its constituents when establishing hours of operation and developing methods for delivering programs, services, and resources.

NSOP must be able to deliver programs remotely using technology that is accessible to all participants.

NSOP should address the needs of students enrolled in online programs when designing and delivering programs.

NSOP must identify and address actions, policies, and structures within its operation that perpetuate systems of power, privilege, and oppression.

5.3 Advocating for Access, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

NSOP must advocate for inclusion, cultural humility, and social justice.

NSOP must enact culturally responsive, inclusive, respectful, and equitable practices in providing programs and services.

NSOP must develop plans for ongoing professional development on cultural humility and workplace equity and inclusion.

NSOP must keep abreast of terms, current trends, practices, new policies, theories, and concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion in order to create and support outcomes that foster an inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals.

5.4 Implementing Access, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

NSOP must collaborate with diverse constituents to address their needs through the development and implementation of culturally relevant, accessible, and inclusive programs, services, policies, procedures, and practices.

NSOP must work collaboratively with other diversity, inclusion, and/or identity-based offices in efforts to implement and advance equity, diversity, and inclusion across the institution.

NSOP should work collaboratively with summer/ semester bridge programs to provide participants a comprehensive overview of the institution's academic and social support services.

NSOP must document the extent to which programs, services, policies, procedures, and practices contribute to student perceptions of belonging.

NSOP must ensure that its personnel are trained to recognize and apply concepts of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice and are held accountable for applying the training to NSOP and its work.

NSOP must ensure that mentoring, training, guidance, and coaching on cultural differences and practices are provided to staff at all levels of the organization.

NSOP must ensure that staff members have up-to-date knowledge of current trends and management best practices relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

NSOP must follow institutional protocol for bias incident investigating and reporting. NSOP personnel must cultivate cultural humility.

NSOP must promote respect for commonalities and differences among people within their historical and cultural contexts.

When educational and/or workplace accommodations are requested, NSOP must provide individuals with an interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations.

PART 6. LEADERSHIP

6.1 Create and Advance Vision, Mission, Goals, and Core Values

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) leadership must align the vision or purpose, mission,

• GUIDING PRINCIPLE: ORGANIZATION, LEADERSHIP, AND HUMAN RESOURCES

goals, and core values for the area with that of the institution.

NSOP leadership must facilitate the shared vision or purpose, mission, goals, and core values for the area.

NSOP leadership must facilitate goal setting and development of goals and professional expectations in collaboration with their team.

NSOP leadership must determine the supervisory structure best suited for the ongoing operations of NSOP.

NSOP leadership must advocate for and actively promote NSOP and institution's vision, mission, goals, and values.

NSOP leadership must inform key constituents
regarding the central role orientation, transition,

and retention programs play in student success and furthering the academic mission.

NSOP leadership must model, encourage engagement, and create space for discourse on the vision or purpose, mission, goals, and core values.

NSOP leadership must identify and address individual, organizational, and environmental conditions that inhibit the pursuit of mission, goals, and outcomes.

NSOP leadership must demonstrate a set of professional ethics and core values.

6.2 Cultivate Access, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Well-Being

NSOP leadership must cultivate an environment of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in the design and delivery of programs and services and in the workplace.

NSOP leadership must cultivate an environment of team well-being in the workplace and through programs and services developed for its constituents.

NSOP leadership must encourage others to contribute to the well-being and effectiveness of the unit and institution.

NSOP must have a published protocol for its constituents to request disability accommodations for its programs and events.

NSOP leadership must encourage personnel to engage in reflection about their work.

NSOP leadership must delegate tasks based on talent and interest.

NSOP leadership must develop and empower new leaders from within the organization.

NSOP leadership must engage team members in discourse to reconcile conflict, address complaints, and improve team morale as needed.

NSOP leadership must develop plans for research, assessment, scholarship, leadership, and service to the institution and the profession.

6.3 Create Collaborative Communities NSOP leadership must create collaborative communities by building a network of its constituents for sharing of ideas, strategizing on change and improvements, collaborating on programs and services, and advocating for additional resources. NSOP leadership must facilitate dialogue with its personnel and constituents about program advancement through processes that include assessment, strategic planning, and continuous improvement.

6.4 Operate with Integrity, Transparency, and Accountability

NSOP leadership must operate with integrity, transparency, and accountability.

NSOP leadership must incorporate both research, evaluation, and outcomes assessment data in review of operations and in decision making.

NSOP leadership must provide updated operational reports to its constituents based on assessment and feedback of activities.

NSOP leadership must communicate with its constituents about current issues affecting the work of NSOP and the profession.

NSOP leadership must advocate for resources to address NSOP and team member needs.

NSOP should advocate for priority in the use of campus facilities and services for formal orientation programming.

NSOP leadership must plan for, allocate, and monitor the responsible use of fiscal, physical, human, intellectual, and technological resources.

6.5 Act Strategically to Bring About Positive Change NSOP leadership must act strategically to bring about positive change in the unit and engage the team in strategic planning processes aligned with the institution's strategic plan and with the NSOP mission, vision, goals, and values.

NSOP leadership must ensure that NSOP strategic planning efforts align with and complement divisional and institutional strategic plans.

NSOP leadership must involve students in the strategic planning process.

NSOP leadership must utilize research, scholarship, evidence, philosophies, principles, and values to guide the work of NSOP.

NSOP professionals should share research and data related to orientation, transition, and retention with program stakeholders.

NSOP leadership must set goals, objectives, and outcomes based on the needs of the populations served, intended learning, development, success outcomes, and program outcomes.

NSOP leadership must ensure that orientation programming is responsive to the current and future needs of new students and the campus community.

NSOP leadership must develop, adapt, and improve programs and services in response to the needs of changing environments, populations served, current research, and evolving institutional priorities.

NSOP leadership must engage diverse constituents and perspectives from within and outside the unit to inform the development and implementation of the strategic planning process.

NSOP leadership must advocate for representation in strategic planning processes at unit, divisional, and institutional levels.

NSOP leaders must advocate for membership on critical committees, especially those related to admissions and enrollment services.

PART 7. HUMAN RESOURCES

7.1 Staffing and Support

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must communicate and collaborate with institutional and/ or divisional human resource departments.

NSOP must use professional standards to identify the staffing needs to achieve its mission and goals.

NSOP must be staffed by personnel qualified to accomplish its mission and goals.

NSOP must have access to technical and support personnel to accomplish its mission.

NSOP personnel must possess an appropriate combination of educational credentials and equivalent experience.

NSOP professional personnel must, as a team, demonstrate knowledge of and competency in areas consistent with those recommended by professional associations, such as NODA.

7.2 Employment Practices

NSOP must have clearly stated, current, relevant, and documented responsibilities and performance expectations for personnel.

NSOP must have clearly stated, current, relevant, and documented organizational charts demonstrating reporting structures.

NSOP must align employment practices with institutional procedures and expectations for recruitment, selection, onboarding and training, supervision, performance management and coaching, evaluation, and professional and organizational development of personnel.

NSOP must determine and implement practices that achieve the goals of successful recruitment, selection, onboarding and training, supervision, performance, and evaluation when institutional practices do not meet expectations.

NSOP must supplement institutional approaches when necessary for personnel to demonstrate their competence.

NSOP leadership must ensure that all personnel have written position descriptions in a format consistent with institutional and/or divisional practices.

NSOP leadership must regularly review position descriptions.

NSOP leadership must conduct searches that candidates describe as fair and equitable.

NSOP leadership must implement recruitment and selection/hiring strategies that comply with institutional policy and demonstrate a deliberate effort to diversify the workforce.

NSOP leadership must develop promotion practices that are fair, inclusive, proactive, non-discriminatory, and in alignment with institutional policy.

NSOP leadership must establish, in partnership with personnel and aligned with institutional policies, work arrangements, scheduling, and modality that achieve department goals, objectives, and outcomes.

7.3 Recruitment

NSOP must develop strategies for talent sourcing and recruitment including

‘ creating a positive brand or message in alignment with the NSOP and institutional mission and values to attract potential personnel ‘ proactively searching for diverse candidates

‘ developing personnel from within NSOP and

the institution ‘ hiring from outside of the institution

‘ investing in multiple and continuous sourcing

methods to diversify its personnel

‘ using technologies, such as social media

and applicant tracking software, to support sourcing and recruiting approaches

NSOP must identify metrics and capture data in support of staffing strategies including

‘ costs associated with sourcing, recruiting,

hiring, and onboarding

‘ percentage of applicants moving on to the next

stage in the hiring process and number of days to fill the position

‘ factors associated with turnover for reasons

other than termination

7.4 Selection Process

NSOP must use a well-defined and transparent selection process that is fair and equitable. NSOP

must utilize a selection process that

‘ communicates with applicants throughout its process and timeline

‘ develops applicant evaluation criteria based on the position description

‘ ensures interviewers are familiar with position

duties, requirements, and selection criteria, and are trained on appropriate and legal interviewing techniques

‘ designs interview questions and processes to assess applicants’ qualifications, skill level,

knowledge, overall competence, and alignment with the organization’s needs ‘ notifies non-

selected applicants promptly

7.5 Onboarding, Training, and Development NSOP must provide a comprehensive professional development plan that includes onboarding, training, and development.

NSOP personnel must receive training when hired and professional development throughout their employment.

NSOP personnel must engage in continuing professional development activities to keep abreast of the research, theories, legislation, policies, and advancements that affect its programs and services.

NSOP personnel should engage in continuous discovery and understanding of orientation, transition, and retention research, theories, and definitions through ongoing study and professional development activities.

NSOP personnel must engage in continuing professional development activities to apply current research when developing new programming, improving existing programming, or advocating for the discontinuation of existing programming.

NSOP must provide personnel with appropriate professional development opportunities or resources that facilitate individual goals and improve competence, skills, and leadership capacity.

When creating training and development programs or experiences, NSOP must ‘ account for different learning styles ‘ use a variety of delivery methods

‘ provide accessible platforms for delivering training and development programs

‘ encourage discussion and challenge to ideas

and respect for opinions

‘ provide additional resources for learning

outside of training

NSOP personnel must have access to resources and receive specific training on policies, procedures, and laws related to

‘ the NSOP and institutional mission, goals, and

core values ‘ the programs and services they support

‘ administrative and operational policies,

procedures, and protocols ‘ resource allocation and planning ‘ privacy and confidentiality

‘ student records and sensitive institutional information ‘ access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice

‘ systems and technologies necessary to perform their assigned responsibilities

‘ sexual misconduct, harassment, and workplace

violence

‘ all laws and policies that directly affect the delivery of NSOP programs and services

NSOP personnel must be trained on how to recognize and address systems of oppression in the workplace and facilitate a welcoming, inclusive work environment.

NSOP personnel must be trained on how and when to refer those in need of additional assistance to qualified staff and must have access to a supervisor for assistance in making these judgments.

NSOP supervisors must ensure that personnel are knowledgeable about and trained in safety, emergency procedures, identifying threatening conduct or behavior, crisis prevention, response, and reporting.

NSOP supervisors must seek input from their personnel during the process of writing performance goals, objectives, and outcomes to be used to plan, review, and evaluate work and performance for each performance cycle.

NSOP supervisors and personnel must update performance plans and job descriptions regularly to reflect changes during the performance cycle.

Performance plans must be consistent with institutional, divisional, departmental, and individual expectations of personnel.

NSOP supervisors and personnel must have periodic conversations to discuss progress towards goals and needed changes to performance plans.

NSOP supervisors must use the results of performance evaluations to measure job competencies, identify growth opportunities, and implement individual and/or collective professional development and training programs.

7.6 Undergraduate and Graduate Student Employees

NSOP student employee roles may include orientation leaders or assistants, tour guides, or campus ambassadors.

NSOP must verify that undergraduate and graduate student employees working in NSOP meet the eligibility and requirements for the position.

Undergraduate and graduate student employees working in NSOP must be carefully selected, trained, supervised, and evaluated by supervisors with applicable educational credentials, work experience, and supervisory experience.

NSOP must train orientation student staff and other paraprofessionals on ways to support the mission and goals of NSOP and the institution.

Training for undergraduate and graduate student employees must address privacy standards when working with sensitive information and data.

Training for orientation staff and other paraprofessionals may include

- understanding of institutional mission, goals, and values
- diversity, equity, and inclusion

- leadership development
- community development
- public speaking
- group facilitation
- providing individual assistance and referrals
- knowledge of campus resources
- role modeling community standards and behaviors
- compliance and reporting policies and procedures
- applicable conduct standards, policies, and procedures
- crisis intervention strategies
- safety and security strategies
- administrative and operational policies ‣ facilities management

NSOP must inform undergraduate and graduate student employees on the limits of their authority, the expectation for appropriate role modeling, and their potential influence on new students.

NSOP undergraduate and graduate student employees must be representative of the institution's student body, reflecting the diversity of the institutional community.

NSOP undergraduate and graduate student employees should be selected using specific performance criteria and efforts should be made to ensure representation across diverse backgrounds.

NSOP supervisors must adhere to the parameters of undergraduate and graduate student employees' job descriptions.

NSOP supervisors must articulate relevant student learning, development, and success outcomes in undergraduate and graduate student employees' job descriptions.

NSOP supervisors must comply with institutional policies regarding standards of work for undergraduate and graduate student employees and adhere to agreed-upon work hours and schedules.

NSOP supervisors must offer flexible scheduling options for undergraduate and graduate student employees.

NSOP supervisors must create an environment that welcomes feedback from undergraduate and graduate student employees.

NSOP supervisors must conduct evaluations and provide feedback.

NSOP supervisors must support undergraduate and graduate student employees with a specific emphasis on supervision, management, coaching, and mentoring.

NSOP supervisors must inform undergraduate and graduate student employees of compensation options in circumstances that necessitate additional hours.

PART 8. COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

8.1 Collaboration

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must collaborate and consult with constituents essential to its success.

NSOP must collaborate and partner with campus colleagues to support student success and wellbeing.

NSOP should develop mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships with community and campus organizations that will enhance the orientation, transition, and new student experience.

NSOP should develop close cooperation with campus departments responsible for university communications, legal counsel, environmental health, emergency management, student conduct, counseling services, case management services, athletics, academic affairs, learning assistance, disability services, student health services, student activities, campus police and public safety, academic advising, undergraduate admissions, facilities services, institutional budgeting and planning, technological services, and any others that are specific to the mission and goals of the institution.

NSOP should collaborate with offices that coordinate supplemental orientation programs.

NSOP must collaborate with its constituents to address and achieve shared program and student learning, development, and success goals and outcomes.

NSOP should engage in an institution-wide process of planning and implementation that systematically involves student affairs, academic affairs, and other administrative units, such as

parent and family programs, public safety, facilities, athletics, student stores, alumni affairs, and the business office.

NSOP should involve faculty members in the development, delivery, planning, and, where possible, staffing of NSOP programs and services.

NSOP must collaborate with institutional units with expertise about issues frequently encountered by new students during their transition into the institution such as sexual violence and alcohol and other drugs.

NSOP must collaborate with its constituents to determine ways to build trust.

NSOP must collaborate with its constituents to define their respective roles and responsibilities in the collaboration.

NSOP should advocate for involvement in committees that affect significant components of orientation programming, such as academic advising and placement testing.

NSOP must collaborate with its constituents to disseminate information about programs and services and garner support and resources.

NSOP must collaborate with institutional units that serve new students to inform students about their services.

NSOP must collaborate with constituents to meet their needs.

NSOP must collaborate with its constituents to engage diverse populations to enrich the educational environment.

NSOP must collaborate with its constituents to solve problems pertinent to the student population, other constituents, or the organization.

NSOP must collaborate with its constituents to assess, evaluate, and improve programs and services.

NSOP must refer its constituents to appropriate resources when assistance beyond the scope of NSOP is needed.

8.2 Communication

NSOP must provide information, services, and resources that explain its mission, goals, and outcomes.

NSOP must develop and implement strategies for outreach and promotion to constituents who use or might benefit from the programs and services.

NSOP must communicate with campus constituents to keep them informed about orientation program content and the information shared with new students.

NSOP must create and implement a schedule regarding the places, formats, and timing of communications to its constituents.

NSOP promotional and descriptive information must be accurate, transparent, and free of deception and misrepresentation.

NSOP must communicate with its constituents using accessible formats and modalities.

8.3 Effective Approaches

NSOP must have and follow procedures and guidelines consistent with institutional policy for ‘ communicating with the media

‘ distributing information through print, broadcast, and digital platforms ‘ using social media and streaming services

‘ providing programs and services through multiple modalities

‘ contracting with external organizations for

delivery of programs and services ‘ developing relationships with donors

‘ disseminating relevant information in a timely manner to its constituents

‘ adhering to the institutional style and branding guidelines

ð GUIDING PRINCIPLE: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

PART 9. ETHICS, LAW, AND POLICY

9.1 Ethical Statements, Policies, and Procedures New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must review and adopt appropriate policies and standards of ethical practice including those of applicable professional associations.

NSOP must have or be able to easily retrieve institutional policies that clearly define and document ethics addressing

‘ conflicts of interest including financial interest,

or appearance thereof, by personnel in the performance of their work ‘ management of institutional funds

‘ acceptance, in gratis, of cash or merchandise

in accordance with institutional advancement reporting policies

‘ solicitation of gifts, in accordance with institutional advancement policies

‘ research and assessment with human

participants and animal subjects

‘ confidentiality of research and assessment data

‘ safe retention of and destruction of student information

‘ development and implementation of an

information retention policy

‘ the rights and responsibilities of its

constituents

‘ disclosure of information in constituents’ records

‘ what is considered speech of its personnel

compared to that of a private citizen

NSOP must have written policies and procedures for operations, transactions, or tasks with ethical and legal implications.

NSOP must have and follow a timeline for formally reviewing policies and procedures.

The creation and revision of NSOP policies and procedures must be informed by feedback from its constituents, other available evidence, and procedures often used across higher education.

NSOP must adopt institutional policies for threats, emergencies, and crises and supplement with approaches that make sense for its specific programs and services.

NSOP must have policies and procedures in place to assess and manage events and facilities with large numbers of participants.

NSOP must have an emergency preparedness plan. The emergency preparedness plan must be compatible with the institution’s emergency preparedness plan.

NSOP must have a business continuity plan. The business continuity plan must address NSOP’s post-emergency response to delivery of essential services.

9.2 Ethical Practice

NSOP personnel must employ ethical decisionmaking in the performance of their day-to-day duties and responsibilities.

NSOP personnel must recognize and avoid conflicts of interest that could adversely influence their judgment and, when unavoidable, recuse themselves from the situation.

NSOP personnel must be honest, fair, and multipartial in interactions with their constituents.

NSOP personnel must demonstrate responsibility for sound and ethical assessment, research, evaluation, and program review.

NSOP must develop and publish a process for its constituents to report and address unethical behavior.

NSOP personnel must make referrals when issues presented by constituents exceed the scope of their position.

9.3 Legal Obligations and Responsibilities NSOP personnel must comply with laws, regulations, policies, and procedures that relate to their responsibilities and pose legal obligations, limitations, risks, and liabilities for individuals and the institution.

NSOP must comply with institutional processes regarding minors attending residential programs.

NSOP personnel who are concerned about students' well-being must ensure that students are referred to appropriate resources in accordance with laws, governmental and institutional policies, and standards of good professional practice.

NSOP must have a process for accessing legal advice needed to carry out their assigned responsibilities.

NSOP must not discriminate against students in its services and programs in compliance with laws, institutional policy, and standards of good professional practice.

NSOP must purchase or obtain permission to use and appropriately cite protected intellectual property resources.

NSOP must comply with institutional and governmental reporting obligations.

9.4 Communication of Ethical and Legal Obligations NSOP must educate new personnel about relevant ethical standards, statements of ethical practice, and related institutional policies and procedures.

NSOP must inform its constituents of ethical and legal obligations and limitations emanating from laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.

NSOP personnel must provide its constituents with information about privacy rights and the disclosure obligations of its personnel.

NSOP leaders must inform personnel about internal and external governance organizations that affect NSOP.

NSOP leaders must inform personnel about professional liability insurance options and refer them to external sources if the institution does not provide coverage.

9.5 Addressing Harassment and Hostile Environments

NSOP must neither participate in nor condone any form of harassment or activity that demeans persons or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

NSOP must adhere to institutional policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and workplace violence.

NSOP must have policies and procedures consistent with institutional policies to address bias incidents.

ð GUIDING PRINCIPLE: LEARNING-CONDUCTIVE STRUCTURES, RESOURCES, AND SYSTEMS

PART 10. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

10.1 Financial Planning

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must provide a clear and accurate financial plan and budget.

In establishing and prioritizing funding needs, NSOP must conduct comprehensive analyses to determine

‘ relevant expenditures required to advance the mission of the unit ‘ unmet needs of the unit

‘ resources needed to develop innovative strategies to advance the mission of the unit ‘ potential funding sources, both internal and external, to the institution

‘ potential influence on its constituents and the institution

‘ future expenditures related to planned growth and maintenance

The NSOP financial plan must be used in decisionmaking.

10.2 Funding

NSOP must have the funding necessary to accomplish its mission and goals.

NSOP should advocate for funding through institutional resources.

In addition to institutional funding, NSOP may consider other sources of funding including state appropriations, student fees, user fees, donations, contributions, concession and store sales, rentals, and dues.

NSOP should make resources available, such as grants, loans, or fee waivers, for students who are unable to afford the costs associated with orientation.

NSOP must use benchmarks and other relevant data to advocate to financial leadership for necessary funding.

NSOP must maintain funding for programs, services, and personnel to effectively meet the stated mission, goals, and outcomes.

NSOP should work with campus units to determine realistic contributions to orientation programs depending upon unit staffing and resources.

NSOP should work with campus partners who contribute materials or staff time to establish whether those efforts are considered in-kind contributions or require additional institutional funding.

NSOP must allocate funds equitably across its units.

NSOP must have the funding to maintain, retain, and promote personnel.

NSOP must have the funding to support the professional development of personnel.

10.3 Financial Management NSOP leaders must have administrative responsibility for the budget.

NSOP must manage funds in accordance with established governmental and institutional laws as well as institutional policies, procedures, and guidelines.

NSOP must have procedures and guidelines consistent with the institutional policy for applying to and managing funds from external resources.

NSOP must have procedures and guidelines consistent with the institutional policy for applying and managing funds from student fees.

NSOP must demonstrate responsible stewardship and use of fiscal resources. NSOP procedures must ‘ be consistent with institutional policies

‘ ensure that purchases comply with laws and codes for usability and access

‘ account for the ethical, environmental, and equity implications of expenditures

PART 11. TECHNOLOGY

11.1 Systems Management

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) must have current technology to support the fulfillment of its mission and goals.

NSOP must ensure that technology used is accessible to diverse users.

NSOP must incorporate accessibility features into technology-based programs, services, and communications.

NSOP must ensure that personnel have computers, software, tools, and other technology to enact their responsibilities effectively.

NSOP must ensure that personnel have access to training and support for the strategic application of technology.

NSOP must establish partnerships with those maintaining distance learning technology on campus.

NSOP must implement a technology (hardware/ software) replacement and/or update plan and cycle with attention to sustainability.

NSOP must have a backup plan to ensure access to data when systems are down or compromised by malware attacks.

11.2 User Engagement

NSOP must use institutionally supported and upto-date technologies to enhance the delivery of programs and services for all users.

NSOP must ensure that technology addresses the needs of its constituents, including its provision of multi-modal programs and services.

NSOP should use current technology to facilitate, improve, assess, and extend access to its programs, products, services, and facilities.

NSOP must determine how best to serve the needs of the student in a virtual learning environment.

NSOP must employ technologies facilitating user interaction.

NSOP must ensure secure access to departmental data for appropriate personnel.

NSOP must have policies and practices to ensure the integrity of departmental data.

11.3 Compliance and Information Security NSOP must have policies on the appropriate use of clear and easily accessible technology.

NSOP must comply with governmental codes and laws and with institutional technology policies and procedures.

NSOP must work with IT professionals to ensure data and systems are secure.

NSOP must provide a secure platform for managing operations involving personal information or records, in accordance with industry best practices and institutional policy and practices.

11.4 Communication

NSOP must have websites and digital platforms adaptable to multiple devices that provide information to its constituents in accessible formats.

NSOP must use technology that allows users to communicate sensitive information in secure formats.

NSOP must evaluate digital platforms for collaboration and communication and implement those that best meet the needs of its constituents.

NSOP must develop contingency plans regarding the continuance of university communications and operations in the event of an operational disruption such as a pandemic, natural disaster, or criminal act.

PART 12. FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

12.1 Space and Facility Design

New Student Orientation Programs (NSOP) spaces must be in suitable facilities with equipment designed to support the NSOP mission, goals, programs, services, and diverse users.

NSOP must advocate for its involvement when designing spaces and facilities associated with its programs and services.

NSOP spaces must be intentionally designed to engage diverse students and other users.

NSOP spaces must promote learning, development, and success.

NSOP spaces must support various program and educational needs.

NSOP spaces must be designed to protect the security and privacy of records and ensure the confidentiality of sensitive information and conversations.

NSOP must incorporate universal design principles.

NSOP spaces and facilities must be designed and constructed to be energy-efficient and sustainable.

If NSOP has personnel who work remotely, the remote facilities and technology must be integrated to support collaboration and efficiency of a hybrid workforce.

NSOP should have an adequate workspace that is conveniently located and suitable for its high level of interaction with the public.

NSOP personnel must have well-equipped, clean, and operable workspaces designed to support their work, responsibilities, and well-being.

Whenever possible, NSOP should maintain a single accessible location for personnel.

NSOP facilities and equipment must be inspected on an established cycle and comply with codes, laws, and established practices for accessibility, cleanliness, health, safety, and security.

NSOP must assess the effectiveness of its facilities and equipment to ensure they are meeting facilities and equipment goals, program outcomes, and diverse user needs.

NSOP must utilize current technology when designing and using the facilities.

12.2 Access to Spaces

NSOP must secure cooperation from the campus community to provide appropriate facilities to implement programs and services.

NSOP should advocate for priority in scheduling or reserving campus facilities for in-person orientation programming.

NSOP spaces must be accessible and welcoming.

NSOP must have a process in place to provide reasonable spaces, facilities, and equipment accommodations when universal design does not meet an individual's accessibility needs.

NSOP personnel must have access to private spaces for confidential conversations with its constituents.

NSOP personnel must be able to safeguard the privacy of their work within the space.

12.3 Equipment Acquisition and Management

When acquiring capital equipment, NSOP must consider expenses related to the life cycle, repair, replacement, and depreciation.

NSOP must incorporate sustainable practices when purchasing equipment.

NSOP must plan expenses for regular maintenance, repair, replacement, and renovations.

NSOP should establish a regular equipment maintenance and replacement schedule.

NSOP must promptly report damaged, malfunctioning, defective, unusable, or faulty facilities, and equipment to the entity responsible for maintenance.

NSOP must have access to properly trained and skilled personnel to maintain the facility and equipment.