Extended Orientations: Enhancing the Academic Success & Social Integration of First-Year Students

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Research Questions

This study examines the academic and social benefits of extended new student orientation.

1. Compared with first-year students who did not participate in an extended new student orientation (Welcome Week), do first-year students who participated in Welcome Week have
   - a greater sense of belonging
   - a higher fall and spring cumulative grade point average
   - a higher rate of retention from their first to second year?
2. Do observed differences between students who did and did not participate in Welcome Week hold when controlling for additional factors?

Institutional Context

The University of Minnesota has five separate campuses--this study examines first-year, non-transfer students at the main campus (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, or UMNTC). UMNTC has approximately 30,000 undergraduate students with approximately 5300+ new first-time, first-year students and 2,600+ new transfer students joining the campus each year.

UMNTC is Minnesota's land-grant and flagship institution and is also the home of the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA).

Extended Orientation: Welcome Week

Welcome Week is a six-day, on-campus experience prior to the start of the fall semester. The program is designed to complement the two day Freshman Orientation experience and provide opportunities to enhance the academic and personal success for first-year students.

Activities promoted during Welcome Week include New Student Convocation; sessions on health and wellness, money management, StrengthsQuest, safety, and diversity; motivational speakers and entertainment; service projects; group trips to the Mall of America, Target, and around Minneapolis; and a student organization/vendor fair. Intentionally-designed activities that foster student engagement and sense of belonging are included in Welcome Week.

Methods

We used two sources of data: the Student Experience in the Research University survey and institutional records. Our methods of analysis included ANOVA and multiple linear regression for question #1 and chi-square tests of independence and logistic regression for question #2.

Instrument

The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey was distributed to all UMNTC undergraduate students in spring 2010. Of the 5,400 first-time, first-year students who enrolled in fall 2009, 1,865 responded to the survey (34.5%).

Variables

We used several demographic and college experience variables in our analyses. These included the following:
Demographic:
- gender, race, international student status, first-generation status (a survey item), and social class status (a survey item)

College Experience:
- participation in Access To Success (ATS, a success program for first-generation students) and first-year seminars, living in residence halls, academic engagement (a survey factor), campus climate (a survey factor), and Welcome Week participation

Outcomes:
- sense of belonging (a survey factor), fall and spring cumulative grade point average, retention from year one to year two

The three factors (academic engagement, campus climate, and sense of belonging) were derived using principal component analysis with Promax rotation.

We used the group of students who answered the survey (n = 1,865) for the analyses predicting sense of belonging and fall/spring grade point averages. Due to non-response bias, we could not use survey data to answer our question related to retention (as few non-returning students completed the survey); therefore, we used all 5,400 students in our analyses predicting retention.

Results

Question One:
Compared with students who did not attend Welcome Week, students who attended Welcome Week had statistically significant and higher sense of belonging, fall/spring cumulative grade point averages, and higher retention rates (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

Analysis of Variance for Sense of Belonging and Fall/Spring Cumulative Grade Point Averages among Welcome Week Attendees and Non-Attendees

	Welcome Week Attendee		Non-Attendee			
	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	F	d
Sense of Belonging	1396	.02 (1.00)	167	-.17 (1.03)	5.31*	.19
Fall GPA	4595	3.16 (.67)	771	2.89 (.91)	98.00***	.34
Spring GPA	4603	3.18 (.69)	773	2.91 (.88)	100.75***	.34

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Crosstabulation of Welcome Week Participation and First-to-Second Year Retention

	Welcome Week Attendee		Non-Attendee		
	n	%	n	%	χ^2
Not retained	442	9.6	130	16.6	34.93***
Retained	4175	90.4	653	83.4	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Question Two:
Compared with students who did not attend Welcome Week, students who attended Welcome Week had statistically significant and higher sense of belonging, fall/spring cumulative grade point averages, and higher retention rates (Tables 3 and 4).

The differences in sense of belonging, gpa, and retention persisted even when controlling for additional factors, including gender, race, first-generation status, social class, participation in first-year seminars and ATS, campus climate, and academic engagement. The odds ratio suggests that students who attended Welcome Week were 28% more likely to return the following year controlling for the other predictors in the model.

Table 3

Regression Models Predicting Sense of Belonging and Fall/Spring Cumulative Grade Point Averages

Predictor	Sense of Belonging		Fall GPA		Spring GPA	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	-.57***	.16	3.24***	.05	3.25***	.05
Welcome Week	.15*	.08	.11*	.05	.11*	.05
Female	-.01	.05	.03	.03	.03	.03
Students of Color	-.09	.07	-.17***	.04	-.15***	.04
International	-.22*	.10	.00	.06	-.02	.06
First-Generation	.03	.06	-.05	.04	-.06	.03
Working-Class	-.19**	.07	-.14**	.04	-.14**	.04
Low-Income	-.39**	.13	-.33***	.08	-.29***	.07
Freshmen Seminar	.05	.05	.07*	.03	.06*	.03
ATS Program	.20	.12	-.08	.07	-.10	.07
Campus Climate	.30***	.02	-.02	.01	-.02	.01
Academic Engagement	.13***	.02	.04***	.01	.04**	.01
Fall term GPA	.15**	.04				
R^2	14.9%		7.0%		6.6%	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Logistic Regression Analysis of the Effects of the Prerequisite System on Students' Retention from Year One to Year Two.

Predictor	B	SE	Wald's χ^2	df	e^β (odds ratio)
Welcome Week	.25*	.13	3.75	1	1.28
Female	-.26**	.10	6.82	1	.77
Students of Color	.10	.13	.53	1	1.10
International	.31	.21	2.28	1	1.37
Freshmen Seminar	.18	.11	2.76	1	1.19
ATS	1.71***	.31	30.92	1	5.53
Residence Halls	.08	.13	.37	1	1.08
Spring GPA	1.24***	.06	390.85	1	3.44
Constant	-1.73***	.22	63.91	1	.18

Note. R^2 = .09 (Cox & Snell), .19 (Nagelkerke). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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The full presentation is located at:
www.ofyp.umn.edu/en/survey-results.html

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