

DRAFT WORKING PAPER ORIENTATION, 2013

In February, 2013, a proposal was brought forward by the Division of Students to re-vision Orientation at York University. The rationale for doing so was drawn directly from the literature which indicates – categorically -- that orientation is our best opportunity to engage new students and position them for success. We know, for example, that successful orientation programs have a significant effect on persistence and GPA (Rode, 2000; Mullendore & Banahan, 2005).

This is particularly important given the unparalleled fiscal and enrolment management challenges facing York. Specifically, direct entry applications dropped significantly in 2011 and 2012 despite an overall provincial increase. Further, our retention rates continue to decrease. Finally, our National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results from 2011, and survey data published annually by the Globe & Mail and McLeans underscore the imperative for leaders at York to refocus on fostering student success and increasing student satisfaction.

With this as context, the Division of Students is advocating for a more coordinated, 7-day Orientation schedule for 2013 with move-in happening on Labour Day: Monday, September 2. (Note that this time frame includes Rosh Hashanah, which must be accommodated.) The week would integrate academic and social orientation for all new undergraduates (including Schulich and York International), thereby precluding multiple residence move-in dates. All stakeholders – most notably AVPs, Deans, College Masters, and Directors of Student & Academic Programs Offices -- would be asked to align their programming and work in partnership with the Division of Students. Most notably, the week would be focused on common learning outcomes and (related) key program components.

Support from the Literature:

To ground our vision for Orientation in best practice, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (www.cas.edu) and the National Orientation Directors Association Planning Manual (Sedotti & Payne, 2010) were consulted. The former holds that orientation programs must:

- (i) facilitate the transition of new students into the institution;
- (ii) prepare students for the institution's education opportunities and student responsibilities;
- (iii) initiate the integration of new students into the intellectual, cultural and social climate of the institution; and,
- (iv) support the parents, partners and children of the new student.

To afford a theoretical framework for consideration, we also reviewed “*Designing an Orientation and Transition Strategy for Commencing Students: a conceptual summary of research and practice.*” (Lizzio, 2006). This model affords the underpinning of the first year experience project at Griffith University in Australia. On page two of the article cited above, Alf Lizzio argues that five ‘areas of student need’ are key to early success at University:

(i) Students’ success at university depends on their sense of capability.

Students who are better prepared for the roles and tasks of university study (viz., ‘learning ready’) tend to have greater early academic success and are consequently more satisfied and persistent with their studies. A student’s sense of capability depends on how well they understand what is expected of them in the student role, their mastery of basic academic skills and their level of commitment to contributing to their learning community. We can help develop

a sense of capability by clarifying and negotiating expectations, providing entry level development of academic skills and engaging students as active members of a learning community.

- (ii) Students' success at university depends on their sense of connectedness**
Students with stronger connections are more likely to be successful learners, effective colleagues and happy people. A student's sense of connectedness depends on the quality of relationships with peers, with staff and their feelings of identification or affiliation with their School or University. We can help develop connectedness by providing opportunities for students to form good working relationships with their fellow students and with staff and encouraging them to get involved with the university.
- (iii) Students' success at university depends on their sense of purpose**
Students with a clear sense of purpose are not only more likely to find their study rewarding, but also to be more committed and persistent when the work gets challenging. A student's sense of purpose depends on their sense of vocation, their engagement with their discipline of study and their capacity to set personal goals. We can help develop a sense of purpose by providing opportunities for students to be as clear as they possibly can about their reasons for going to uni and their choice of degree, to see the relevance of their course of study and to systematically develop their strengths and talents.
- (iv) Students' success at university depends on their sense of resourcefulness**
Successful students not only know how to study but also how to proactively manage the challenges of their whole university experience. A student's sense of resourcefulness depends on their ability to navigate the university system to get the help and information they need, willingness to speak up if they have a problem and an ability to balance their work, life and study commitments. We can help students to be more resourceful by providing clear and accessible roles, procedures and resources and encouraging timely help-seeking behaviour.
- (v) Students' success at university depends on their sense of academic culture**
Successful students know the value of learning 'how things are done' and what is important or valued in new culture. A student's sense of cultural competence depends on their appreciation of the core values and ethical principles of the university and how these will inform their approaches to study and working relationships with fellow staff and students. We can help students by clearly answering the question: 'what is a university?'

Note: other research affirms that a quality, evidence-based Orientation program is particularly important for learners who are first generation attendees, those defined as 'mature' or part-time, those who are socio-economically marginalized, and/or those who commute. This literature speaks to large sub-populations at York.

History: Orientation @ York University

Responsibility for orientation planning at York has rested largely with the Colleges. Together with Faculty and program partners, each of the nine Colleges delivers both a social orientation program (planned and hosted by students through their College Council) and an academic orientation program (typically led by the Office of the Master).

In 2011 and 2012, Orientation lasted a total of ~11 days (academic orientation in Colleges or via York International lasts 1-3 days; social orientations run by College Councils last 7-10 days). A separate orientation for Schulich lasts 1-3 days and often before residence move-in. For more specific information on dates/programming, please see Appendix A.

In summary, the calendar of Orientation events over the last two years includes a significant emphasis – particularly within the Colleges – on social programming (10 days last fall); it also affords for an academic program that varies in length and – presumably – content. The involvement of Faculties in academic orientation planning and/or programming is inconsistent. Finally, the scheduling of orientation events does not appear to be well coordinated such that, for example, events transpire after the principal residence move-in date.

New Student Orientation Workshop Results:

A vibrant, preliminary consultation with ~40 key campus stakeholders was held on March 12, 2013. Facilitated by AVP Susan Vail, the three-hour session included invitees from the Faculties (as identified by the FEOs), the Colleges, ACMAPS, Security Services, VPFA, CSBO/Housing Services and the Division of Students. Of specific note, students were well represented; most of the College Council Presidents attended, as did a number of peer mentors from both the Faculties and the Colleges. Also of import, academic colleagues were well represented; most of the College Masters attended, as did three Associate Deans.

The first part of the session focused on ***what about our current Orientation strategy was working well***. In no particular order, the following emerged as consistent themes across seven small (mixed) groups:

- small group facilitation
- peer mentorship
- the 'Red Zone' and other innovative transition programs like Jump Start and YU Start
- the diversity of experiences/opportunities (e.g., awareness re student clubs, exciting social events/trips, etc.)
- using the Colleges as a 'hub' of activity

The second part focused on ***opportunities for improvement***. The areas cited consistently included:

- the disconnect between social and academic orientation should be bridged
- the absence of a coherent, institutional vision and strategy (e.g., learning outcomes, training programs, evaluation)
- the imperative to better connecting students to YORK
- participation rates (i.e., they should be higher)
- the reliance on 'talking heads' to deliver academic orientation

Under the auspices of identifying the key components of Orientation for 2013, participants identified what might be described as 'values' or principles that attendees suggested should underpin our re-visioning efforts. Specifically:

- orientation is but one component piece of a successful transition to University; York must look at transition more holistically to include a spectrum of first year experiences;
- a consistent, quality, evidence-based orientation program should be available to all incoming students at York University; YU Start (as it evolves) is widely viewed as a principal tool for delivering on this imperative in future years
- participation rates should be maximized to ensure access to a core program
- Colleges should remain the primary 'hub' for undergraduate orientation
- a coordinated, mandated approach to training for staff and peer leaders is critical

- the Lizzio (2006) model should guide our thinking about transition in a broad sense, including orientation week
- orientation week should be FUN, foster engagement, and build pride at York University

Finally, there was some very preliminary discussion about the key components that should be prioritized in orientation planning and programming for 2013 (note that this relates to content or learning foci, not to the method or locale of delivery):

- Community Values:** human rights, gender-based violence, social justice, behavioral expectations, etc. (note that this speaks to a commitment made by President Shoukri to have a mandatory session for all first year students focused on safety). (*This speaks to a student's 'sense of academic culture'.*)
- University 101:** expectations, learning styles, coping strategies, resources, learning supports, etc. (*This speaks to a student's 'sense of resourcefulness' and 'sense of capability'.*)
- Making Connections:** building relationships - student:student, student:faculty, student:staff. (*This speaks to a student's 'sense of connectedness'.*)
- Why are you here?:** future pathing, career planning, alumni mentoring. (*This speaks to a student's 'sense of purpose'.*)

Recommendations & Next Steps:

- This draft working paper will be shared widely, starting with those who attended the March 12 workshop. Follow-up consultations will be facilitated in April with the College Masters, members of College Councils, York International, Schulich, and Osgoode. The re-visioning proposal will also be discussed at a Dean's Meeting.
- A staff resource from the Division of Students will be identified to coordinate the 2013 Orientation calendar and a core training program for student leaders. He/she will have primary responsibility for delivering a seven-day schedule that furthers specific learning objectives and integrates social and academic orientation programming across the campus.
- Student Community & Leadership Development will continue to:
 - coordinate social orientation and planning approvals via YODA
 - organize and implement 'Orient the Leaders' training and orientation leaders contract
 - facilitate Parent's Orientation
 - collaborate with Sport York in relation to a York football game on Saturday, 7-Sept-2013
 - collaborate with Centre for Human Rights for 'Can I Kiss You' event
- Student Community & Leadership Development will provide leadership to:
 - a seminal event for all incoming students at beginning of Orientation
 - a coordinated assessment of orientation programming, based on NODA benchmarking, CAS standards and the Lizzio model.
 - an expanded Family & Parents program, focusing on regular communications
 - an expanded and intentional residence orientation program that welcomes and introduces residents to living and learning in their new community
 - a revised YODA retreat
- Expanding YU Start is an institutional priority and will be widely available to 101 students at York for fall, 2014. As the program evolves through the next phase of the pilot (i.e., fall, 2013), members of the YU Start team must continue to work collaboratively with colleagues in the Division of Students so that the re-visioning work done this spring/summer is reflected in their planning.

Appendix A: Orientation Dates/Schedules 2011 + 2012

2011

(Residence Move-in: Friday, September 2)

Host	Social Orientation	Academic Orientation
Bethune College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Aug 29, Aug 31-Sept 1 (3 d)
Calumet College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Aug 30-Sept 1 (3 d)
Founders College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Aug 23-25 (3 d)
Glendon College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Sept 6 (1 d)
MacLaughlin College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Aug 29-30 (2 d)
New College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Aug 31 (1 d)
Stong College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Aug 29-30 (2 d)
Vanier College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Aug 31 & Sept 6 (2 d)
Winters College	September 2-11 (7 d)	Sept 6 (1 d)

2012

(Residence Move-in: Friday, August 31)

Host	Social Orientation	Academic Orientation
Bethune College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Aug 28-30 (3 d)
Calumet College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Aug 28-30 (3 d)
Founders College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Aug 28-30 (3 d)
Glendon College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Sept 4 (1 d)
MacLaughlin College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Aug 27 & 28 (2 d)
New College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Aug 28 (1 d)
Stong College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Aug 29 & 30, Sept 4 (3 d)
Vanier College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Aug 29-30 (2 d)
Winters College	Aug 31-Sept 9 (10 d)	Sept 4 (1 d)

Separate orientations for Osgoode and/or Schulich last 1-3 days, and typically happen outside of the other dates and before residence move-in:

Schulich	Social Orientation	Academic Orientation
2011	Aug 31–Sept 2 (3 d)	Aug 31 (1 d)
2012	Aug 29-31 (3 d)	Aug 29 (1 d)

York International	Orientation
2011	Sept 1-2 (2 d)
2012	Aug 29-31 (3 d)