

Presentation Title:

Working Together: Communicating Campus Culture to First-Year Students

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Examples of Cultural Artifacts Found on College Campuses

Type	Example	Location	Category
Physical Setting	Blue football field	Boise State University	Physical
Architecture	Benjamin Franklin statue	University of Pennsylvania	Physical
Traditions/Rituals	Mountain Day	Williams College	Behavioral
Language	We are Virginia Tech!	Virginia Tech University	Verbal
Symbols	Van Wickle Gates	Brown University	Multiple
Heroes/Heroines	Leland & Jane Stanford	Stanford University	Multiple
History/Saga	Cathedral of Learning	University of Pittsburgh	Multiple

Key Findings:

According to both student groups, sharing personal experiences with a sense of enthusiasm provided an opportunity for students to communicate the meanings of key pieces of campus culture such as traditions and rituals. The students acknowledged that while sharing personal experiences is optional and informal, it was their role to facilitate these discussions since they were already familiar with the institution's culture and why these artifacts were important. Spending time in small groups with new students at orientation provided critical opportunities to facilitate these informal conversations and share personal experiences related to campus culture. The student instructors identified small groups in their first-year seminar classrooms as also critical for having such conversations with students. Overall, both groups of students thought that while campus culture was shared informally mostly, there was also a sense of responsibility to lead this effort in their roles. Since new students were anxious about transitioning into a different environment, the student instructors felt it was their role to take the initiative and share personal experiences to help students feel more comfortable.

Key Implications:

Though most of the participants acknowledged that communicating campus culture happens informally, there was an overlap in the findings that suggest first-year student instructors and student orientation leaders do this in similar ways. This study argues that both groups of students could work more closely together, bringing both student affairs' and academic affairs' units together, to intentionally communicate campus culture and key pieces such as artifacts to first-year students. Previous research indicates that the greater a student's academic and social integration, the more connected he or she will be to the institution (Tinto, 2012). Orientation is one means of effectively assisting in this integration and helping students persist (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthering these points, this study argues that students should discuss the importance of campus culture with incoming students as part of new student orientation and first-year seminar classrooms. These efforts would help first-year students in transitioning to a new environment as well as promoting students success.

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