Presentation Title:
Working Together: Communicating Campus Culture to First-Year Students

Presenter Contact Information:
Ryan Theroux, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, First-Year Studies
Curry College
rtheroux@curry.edu
617-333-2971

Examples of Cultural Artifacts Found on College Campuses

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

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.
References:


